

THE R.B.A.S. 22.

H I S T O R Y

O F

L O R D S T A N T O N.

A N O V E L.

By a Gentleman of the *Middle Temple*,
Author of the TRIAL, or History of CHARLES
HORTON.

V O L. V.

L O N D O N:

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FIRST EDITION.
THE
HISTORY
OF
LORD STANTON.

LETTER LXXV.

To JAMES HILGROVE, Esq.

I Congratulate you too, my dear James, with all my heart. One conquest thus gained over yourself, is of more importance to you than all the admonitions that can be given you. So much more powerful is the testimony of your own reason, and the conviction of your own senses, than

all the maxims and axioms of all the wise men that ever lived. I rejoice with you, believe me, that you have escaped doing any thing that must give you pain on reflection. How much more noble is it in you to warn unwary innocence from the paths of vice, than to lead it into the road of destruction. It is God-like to save, to protect, to defend; it is the attribute of the enemy of mankind to destroy, to betray, and to ruin: it is, without doubt, meritorious to resist and combat our passions; if possible, to quell them. Yet it is no more than our duty. And is there any command so glorious and so easy, as that which enjoins us to do as we would be done by, and only directs us to do justice. The Turks have a saying among them, which I cannot help admiring. "The most excellent of all virtues," say they, "is purity of intention. Justice for an hour is better than devotion for a year." What a moral does this little adage contain? and I have

I have no doubt but the upright man shall be more justified in the fight of his Creator, than the Devotee or the Sectarist. Which is there of us that would not fly out into a rage, to find another man attempting to seduce his wife, his daughter, his sister, or his niece? But which of us does not endeavour to serve others so? Where is the justice in this? You have made some recompence to the woman whom you unhappily ruined: I hope she will profit by your bounty; but if she does not, you have one crime the less to reproach yourself with. As touching Miss Whately, I shall do every thing in my power to promote your good intentions towards her, and I suppose matters must be exactly as you have stated them, else Lady Stanton is the last person in the world that would enter into your head to place her with. If her brother should not be reconciled to her, I believe I have interest enough to get her received at Stanton Hall. Thus much for

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your affairs; now for some of my own. The neighbourhood of his mistress, is cause of joy to the lover: it is otherwise with me. Though so near Matilda, I am not able to stir out, am forbidden her sight, and left in solitude, to the indulgence of my own thoughts, with nothing to cheer me. What may be the issue of this affair is beyond my knowledge. But should it not be successful, I shall be plunged into misery. I have indulged a passion that was delightful in the beginning, that promised much pleasure in the pursuit, held forth the greatest prospect of happiness in the completion of it—now it wears another face. It is darkened with doubt and suspicion; it is attended with misfortunes and disappointments, and the uncertainty of success damps my hopes, though it cannot extinguish my love. Winter has now commenced his cruel reign, the country is deprived of its beauty, and has lost its charms; but to a sickly distempered mind,

like

LORD STANTON. 5

like mine, it is quite indifferent what livery it wears. The pomp of the blossomy spring, the pride of summer, and the wealth of autumn, are equally disregarded by the heart not at ease. Mine has long sought for rest without finding it; when it will arrive I know not, but it will be exceedingly welcome whenever it comes. It is now, since I saw Matilda, somewhat above two months. To review that time, and find it filled with anxiety, with trouble, and a thousand nameless griefs, which only those who love can experience, is a melancholly consideration; but to look forward, and see but little hopes of any alteration for the better, is still more grievous. Perhaps you will tell me, that these woes which afflict me, are all of my own creation, and that I suffer deservedly. Oh no, Hilgrove! surely love is involuntary, we cannot resist the impression: else, who would deserve pity that rush'd willingly into a state so full of uneasiness. The only

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light I have to lead me through this wilderness, is the promise she has made me, that Miss Atkins will give me some account of her if I desire to learn. Can she doubt it. Alas it is the business, the employment of my life' I have no other thoughts than what she is the subject of, no ideas that do not originate from her. Thus I live, my dear James. May you never experience the miseries of hopeless love.

If you should go into Thompson's neighbourhood, make it your business to see him, and inform me how he is. It is a long time since I have heard from him, and he is a man whom I most truly respect. Success attend thee, my dear Hilgrove; may you be as happy as I wish you.

GEORGE BENSON.

LETTER

LETTER LXXVI.

To ROBERT ASGILL, Esq.

THE family of Greenhill Park returned to London about a week ago, and I am once more at liberty. The constraint to which Matilda enjoined me was less irksome upon that account than any other. Was it only for her own sake that she desired me to be concealed, that my appearance might not give room to malicious tongues to blast her reputation? or did she fear that I would have revenged myself upon Lord Averston for his deceit? Did she fear for him, and therefore hide me? Yet it was her desire, and let it proceed from what cause it may, the readiness of my obedience will shew her how much I esteem her commands. As it is from Miss Atkins I am to learn every thing I can know of Matilda, I persuaded Mr.

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Mannersley to introduce me to her family. He complied, and I had the pleasure of a conversation with the friend of Matilda.

" Miss Conyers is gone to London, and
" when can you expect a letter from her ?"

" In a week's time."

" It is an age of uncertainty ; but should
" it come sooner, may I hope you will
" give me notice of it ?"

" If possible."

" Perhaps you are unacquainted with
" the anxieties of a lover. It may be that
" your breast has been free from the darts
" of the revengeful deity. But yet you
" have compassion and pity."

" Mr. Benson may command my ser-
" vice."

This was too general, and I attempted to draw her into a particular conversation which might serve to discover the sentiments of her friend. But she was too wary, and whenever I turned the discourse that way, she always found means to disengage herself

herself from it. I took my leave, entreating her to favour me with a message, ifshe should receive a letter before the time she mentioned; or that I would again wait on her at that time, to know what commands Miss Conyers had for me. Though I had promised I had not patience to attend the expiration of the week, but paid another visit to Miss Atkins. I was successful, she just had received a letter from Miss Conyers.

"Has she done me the honour to mention my name?"

"Your doubting it shews you are un-acquainted with my sweet friend. When you shall have experience of her sincerity, her truth, the strictness of her word, which is inviolable; her untainted honour, you will hold it little less than a sin to form a suspicion of her."

"Ah, I do not, Miss Atkins, I do not; but will you permit me to express those fears that now agitate my bosom. I

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" know not but she may have changed her
" mind, and have offered some reasons for
" so doing. Excuse my impatience. Your
" zeal for your friend is truly commenda-
" ble, but that prevents my knowing
" whether she yet remembers me."

" She does."

" Thousands of thanks to her for so
" doing. But what says she? How is
" she?"

" It is impossible to answer so many
" questions at once; but I will read you
" that paragraph of the letter which con-
" cerns you. Her own words will please
" you better than any others."

She read :

" I referred Mr. Benson to you, my
" dear Caroline, to inform him what is be-
" come of me, should he be desirous to
" know. How weak and erroneous must
" my conduct appear to you, my sweet
" friend! But I gave that gentleman a pro-
" mise to let him know where he should see
" me

" me in London, which though it escaped
" me in the hurry and agitation I was then
" in, I must comply with it, imprudent as
" it may be, and though it may lessen me
" in your opinion, and make me cheap in
" his—"

I could not forbear interrupting her.

" Ah! then she must think meanly of
" me, to suppose I could misinterpret her
" condescension, or judge amiss of her
" kindness. You know her heart, and
" perhaps have heard her mention why
" she should imagine me capable of such
" baseness. If she has told you her rea-
" sons, I beseech you inform me, that I
" may alter my conduct, and pursue the
" path that will lead to her good opinion."

" What strange creatures you men are!
" You are not contented that we should
" wave that delicacy and reserve which be-
" longs to us, but you expect every thing
" your own way at once. Ought not you
" to be satisfied that Matilda makes good

" her promise, and tells you where you
" may see her; which, if you considered
" rightly, is an acknowledgement that she
" designs to meet you. What would you
" have more?"

" Nothing, nothing: you have convinc-
" ed me that I am unreasonable: but tell
" me where, dear Miss Atkins, tell me
" where?"

" Have patience, and you shall be in-
" formed."

She resumed the reading Matilda's let-
ter:

" This promise has thrown me into ma-
" ny difficulties, and did I not hold my
" word sacred, there are many strong rea-
" sons which almost persuade me to refuse
" fulfilling it. Yet I will see him, be-
" cause I have promised it; though such
" a proceeding, should it come to the
" knowledge of my aunt, will afford her a
" fresh excuse for persecuting me. I shall
" also

" also suffer myself to be exposed to the
" family where I must see him, and lie un-
" der the imputation of carrying on a
" clandestine intrigue, and give room for
" slander to say things of me, that my
" soul shudders at. I am extremely un-
" happy, and my granting an interview
" to Mr. Benson will not, I fear, remove
" my uneasiness. He will hear of me in a
" fortnight's time if he enquires after Miss
" Clinton, at Mr. Clinton's, in — Street,
" Berkeley square. The die is cast: and I
" will see him, though perhaps it may be
" the last time. The suspicions that he
" lies under, and which he refuses to clear
" up, prevent my taking a step which
" might be justifiable only, as his charac-
" ter is unimpeachable."

She stopped.

" Do not end here, Miss Atkins: there
" remains somewhat yet to read."

" That
and —

"That does not relate to you," replied she, smiling.

"Yet there may be something from which I can pick some hope."

"You would not tempt me to betray my friend's secrets, and my own. Is it not enough that she will see you?"

"It is more than I deserve, I will confess : but yet she may speak more favourably of me in another place ; and that you conceal from me."

It was all in vain : I could not prevail on her to acquaint me with Matilda's sentiments of me ; nor could she penetrate the veil of obscurity which I have cast around me, though she tried in every manner she could to make me acknowledge something. My answers were general, and she could not obtain the satisfaction she wished. I promised to call again upon her, to receive her commands before I left the country. I follow the lovely maid Asgill, I fly to her feet : if she knew how sincerely I loved her,

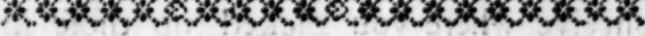
her, she would not hesitate to declare her bosom was inspired with a mutual passion. Perhaps it is not ; but since this letter is arrived, I will not despair: Does she not promise to see me ? Does she not give me an opportunity of breathing out my vows to her ? Perhaps she will pity, it may be love me. This personated character will soon be needless : I am tired of it : but if it has occasioned me some misfortunes, if under this appearance I can gain the heart of Matilda, it will be the source of all my joy. It is now come to a point, and a few days will convince me of the truth of her sentiments. What rapture will it be to find her heart touched with the same flame in which mine is consumed ! to learn that she esteems, that she loves me ! The thought is beyond expression delightful ; what must the reality be ? Let me not be disappointed, kind heaven ; for if I should, it would be insupportable. My heart would not be able to bear the shock, and,

and, incapable of sustaining the load of grief that would ensue, must burst. It is not to be borne even in imagination. Mannersley, to whom I have imparted some small share of the intelligence I have received, gives me the greatest hopes, and assures me of success. O Reilly, to whose friendship I am much indebted, yet doubts ; and from the experience he has had of the fickleness and inconstancy of the sex, fears that I shall fail as he did. He seems extremely concerned at my leaving the country, and foretells that we shall not see one another again. He laments the narrowness of his fortune, that will not permit him to accompany me ; assuring me, that next to his brother he esteems me, short a time as we have been acquainted. I would ask him to go with me to London, if I could do it without offending his delicacy. Some method may be contrived. If he is informed that his company will be of service to me, and that I shall stand in need

need of his assistance, it may prevail on him. Your letters will find me for the future at the accustomed place in London. There rather should I hope to meet you. When I see you again, perhaps, my dear Asgill, you will have reason to congratulate me, and acknowledge, that all your suspicions of my success were ill founded. Matilda is virtuous as she is fair : but kindness will heighten her charms, and the blush of love will throw a lustre over all her beauties.

Adieu.

GEORGE BENSON.



LETTER LXXVII.

To WILLIAM ROGERS, Esq.

THE letter, dear Rogers, missed me in the country, but followed me to London, where I now am. It astonishes me.

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me. And can you tamely see the girl you love taken away before your face? You do not love her, that is plain, or you would not have been so quiet. What is it to you, engaged in the pursuit of happiness, whether Thompson is of an irreproachable life or not. You cannot tell either, but that Charlotte will be as fond of you when she is separated from him. But whether she was or no, nothing should prevent my trying: if I was not happy, I would take care she was not, or he either. But there is every probability in your favour; and his hopes once destroyed, yours revive. I cannot conceive where you picked up those silly notions, which your letter abounds with.

" You love her too well to make her
" unhappy :" and, " You cannot think of
" prejudicing a man who has never
" done you any injury."

You

You put me out of all patience: has not he taken Charlotte from you? Is not that an injury? Does not he prevent the enjoyment of your wishes? Is not that an injury? Has not another woman a prior right to the vows and services, by which he has gained your mistress? Has not he injured her then, and do you hesitate whether you shall revenge it or no? Away with these scruples: awaken Louisa's jealousy, and inform Charlotte of her lover's deceit: your love, the interest you take in her happiness and welfare, will be a sufficient excuse for you to avoid the charge of intermeddling impertinently in other persons concerns. Do this, or lose Charlotte for ever. I have hitherto thought that you were a man of more resolution than to be frightened at trifles, or than yield your mistress to any man. The bold and brave ever force the applause of the fair, and gain their

their hearts. The timid and cautious must always lose them. Henceforth never mention her name to me: for I shall always laugh at thee, and conclude you only dreamed you were in love, when you refuse to embrace the means to gain her, though it was encompassed with dangers, and beset with difficulties, and though your life or that of your antagonist, were put to the hazard. Tell me no more of it: for either your passion or your resolution is not strong enough, to oppose the dangerous face of your affairs. Mine are not in a very good train. I am unfortunate as well as you. But you suffer by negligence; whilst all my care, my vigilance and assiduity will not avail or put me in a better condition. I have been indisposed, and that has occasioned my not writing to you before. My last letter took notice of a suspicion I had conceived, that a fellow in the habit of a countryman had some sort

fort of access to Matilda. This I determined to be resolved of: and one morning when she had risen particularly early, I placed spies to watch her, and roused Sir Marmaduke and Lady Grigsby, who attempted to surprise her one way, whilst I attempted to prevent the fellow's escaping the other. But she outwitted us all; for I stopped a suspicious-looking Irishman, and was determined to make him give an account of himself, when I found my pistol struck out of my hand by a country fellow, whom I think was the very man I was looking after. Another pistol which I had about me, I thought had luckily done his business; but it only went through his cloaths, and he in return knocked me down. I suffered a violent contusion in my head, and the rascal escaped: and though I offered 100 guineas reward for him, he was not to be found. This confirms me in the notion, that it

was somebody in disguise, perhaps Benson, for I could not see his face, and the Irishman was well known by Sir Marmaduke Grigsby. A disappointment of this nature affected me greatly: and I kept my room for two or three days, to see whether Matilda's humanity would induce her to have any pity, or at least to shew any for me. But it was of no effect. She appeared to be totally unconcerned at this affair: but I will be hanged if she was not a party in it. Every passion in my breast is interested in this pursuit now, and if ever I have any power over her, she shall feel it. I would attempt a *Coup de maine*, but she is too well supported for me ever to hope for success. But I will not quit her till every hope is extinct. If she will not yield to me, I will be as obstinate, and plague her. I have been enquiring after Benson, and find there is some mystery in his conduct. He is not in town
I be-

I believe, but the people where he lodges give no satisfactory answer to any one that enquires about him. His servant is there, and tho' many ways of tempting him have been tried, there have been none capable of making him open his lips on the subject we want to know. All that can be done is to watch Madam, and if she should contrive to see him any where, it will not remain a secret to me. Would I could learn that you engaged with the same earnestness: for though I am unfortunate, there is no reason that you should be so. Farewell, my dear Will, believe me interested in your affairs, and that I would do every thing to serve you. Follow my advice and be prosperous.

Thine,

AVERSTON.

L E T -

LETTER LXXVIII.

To GEORGE BENSON, Esq.

I RECEIVED yours, containing the history of the unfortunate O'Reilly. Unhappy man! I who know the scorn and have experienced the contempt that waits on poverty, feel more truly for his woes, and sympathize in his distress. I long to be acquainted with him, to heal the wounds made by the arrows of affliction, to pour balm into the sores of his heart. Let others seek the great and hunt after the powerful. Be it mine to select the wretched, to visit the miserable: happy, if my assistance can relieve them, if my cares can console them, or if I can bid them hope for happier days. This is the employment of humanity. The ills of the body may be borne, however grievous; there is a continual hope of receiving assistance from the power

power of medicine, that enables us to endure them. *But a wounded spirit who can bear?* that is the most irremediable of all evils, and what few concern themselves to alleviate in others. Of all those slights which pain a generous mind, those which arise from a knowledge of his poverty hurt him most. There is something more intolerable in that superiority, which wealth gives, than in any other. We can less patiently put up with those contemptuous insults, which the opulent eternally and inhumanly load the indigent and the necessitous with. The generous and noble heart is often oppressed with poverty, while meanness and villainy exult in wealth. But if ever fortune should throw poor friends in your way, prevent their distresses, nor put modest and ingenuous want to the trouble and necessity of asking what they stand in need of. The noble, the generous Pliny, one of the brightest

characters of antiquity, expresses himself on this head, in a manner becoming his usual benevolence. “Volo eum qui sit
“veré liberalis, contribuere patriæ, pro-
“pinquis, affinibus, amicis, sed amicis
“pauperibus.” *He who would be truly generous should contribute to his country, to his dependants, to his relations, to his friends, but above all to his poor friends.* Few are those who think in this manner, and fewer who act up to it. Anaxagoras, noble, rich, forsook every advantage of life for the study of philosophy. Pericles the first and best orator of Greece was his scholar, and the greatest man then in Athens. Anaxagoras wanting the necessaries of life in his old age, resolved to starve himself. Pericles hearing it, flew to his house, and intreated him to renounce his melancholly resolution.

“When one wants a lamp, replied
“the philosopher, one takes care to sup-
“ply

“ply it with oil, that it may not go
“out.”

I think it is Cicero, who adds the reflection.

“How much more noble had it been
“in Pericles, to have prevented that re-
“proach of his master’s, by supplying
“his necessities, than to have applied to
“him when it was too late.”

When you become possessed of fortune, of power, let it be your business to supply the lamp with oil. A man lays up a treasure in his friends by his generosity and benevolence, where theives cannot break in and steal, neither can the moth or rust destroy them; they are engraved in indelible characters on grateful hearts, and what shall obliterate them? Whilst other men of rank and fortune are a prey to sharpers by their follies, or to the wicked by their vices, be it yours to build yourself a lasting fame, and an eternal happiness in the support

and defence of the virtuous, the poor and the desolate, against the vicious, the rich, and the powerful: there are many of both sorts, and the latter, like pikes, prey on their own species; only with this difference, that the human tyrants have the greater enjoyment in the exertion of their abilities to destroy.

But to return to the subject that lies nearest your heart, and which I perceive, from your manner of writing, has robbed you in some measure of reflection. Remember, Benson, the hour of pleasure, the moment of delight, the *primrose path of dalliance*, may induce a man to believe that all the remainder of his life is to be of a piece with the beginning of it. But that flowery path will lead to the thorny road of disgust. Familiarity will make those beauties cheap in your eye which you now praise so much; and Matilda, the much-admired, the lovely Matilda, in a few months will cease to be the object of adoration.

She

She will become common, stale; and your nicer appetite will seek another fair. She will be neglected and despised. This must be the consequence of marrying too early; for use will make us despise what is most beneficial to us. Sharp as this problem may appear in theory, it is a true one in practice, which every day convinces us of. Think then, ere you proceed further in winning this young Lady's affection, upon what foundation your regard for her is built. If it is the vain desire of your heart, if it is that passion which the possession of the beautiful object will cool, or perhaps totally extinguish; fly her, I beseech you, and make not both her and yourself miserable. If it is founded on the conviction of your senses, on the testimony of your reason, which prefers her before any woman you have hitherto seen; if you are sure you can spend your life with her, and can form to yourself the prospect of living happily together in a state of old age, when Time

shall have divested you of the blossoms of youth, and the face of your fair Matilda shall be wrinkled, when the ardency of desire shall be softened into a tender friendship, marry her : make her your wife, and may every blessing that crowns the nuptial state be yours. But examine your heart before you make the determination. Deceive not yourself ; but, by searching into the reality of your inclinations, lay the foundation of your future happiness.

Adieu.

Yours ever,

R. ASCILL.



LETTER LXXIX.

To R. ASCILL, Esq.

YOUR letter, much-esteemed friend, came not to my hands till after I had seen Matilda. From the moment I knew
she

she would see me in London, I made every preparation for an interview that was so important to me. As it was my intention to prevail on O Reilly to accompany me, there was no other method of doing it but telling him, that his presence would be of the greatest service to me. His regard overcame the scruples of his delicacy, and he bore me company. When the time of my probation was elapsed, I repaired to Mr. Clinton's: my name gained me instant admission; and I addressed Miss Clinton as an acquaintance, whom I came to pay my compliments to on my return to town. Fortunately she was alone, and I had an opportunity of asking her concerning Miss Conyers. She told me she expected to see her every moment. It was not long ere she came. An universal trepidation seized me, nor could I behold the lovely maid without the greatest emotion. A conscious blush augmented her beauty. The transparent veil of bashful modesty heightened the

charms it was intended, but in vain, to conceal. Miss Clinton afforded us a privacy for communicating our thoughts to each other, by absenting herself.

“ How much am I indebted to you, Miss Conyers, for giving me an opportunity, once more, of assuring you of my affection, of declaring to you, that your lovely idea has been ever uppermost in my thoughts; and that since our last interview peace has been a stranger to me. But thus to behold you again, banishes the remembrance of my sufferings; and I am once more happy.”

“ I could not refuse this satisfaction to a Gentleman who has endured so much upon my account. I heartily rejoice at your escape from Lord Averston’s malevolence. I suffered greatly for that affair; and the risque I ran then, should teach me more prudence than to venture to incur my aunt’s displeasure, and the scandal of the world, again. But the fulfilling

“ fulfilling of the promise I made you has
“ led me into the same error once more.
“ You wished to see me. The consequen-
“ ces of this meeting will be fatal to me, if
“ discovered ; and it will be impossible for
“ them to be frequent. I have complied
“ with your desire ; and beg to know why
“ you requested it.”

“ Ah, Matilda ! your own heart would
“ have informed you, if I had been fortu-
“ nate enough to have touched it. If it is
“ my only happiness, my chief delight, to
“ behold you, to hear the music of your
“ voice, to view the splendor of your eyes,
“ do you wonder that I should request to
“ see you ? When my heart labours under
“ a load of inexpressible cares, when my
“ soul is filled with love and tenderness, are
“ you surprised that I want to pour out my
“ vows at your feet, and incline you to
“ pity me ? Yet, Matilda, my intreaties
“ have been unsuccessful, as yet you have
“ been regardless of them. I want to make

“ you sensible of my sincerity and my love.
“ You credit neither, and I have the
“ mortification to find that I must be
“ wretched.”

“ You accuse me unjustly, and your
“ own heart must bear testimony to the
“ truth of what I assert. Can you suppose
“ I would thus appoint to meet you, if I
“ was insensible to your addresses? Do you
“ imagine I would run the risque of being
“ exposed without having some inducement?
“ No, Mr. Benson; you see, and ungener-
“ ously triumph over my weakness.”

“ May happiness forsake me, if I would
“ for a world create you a moment's unea-
“ finesse. Think not so unworthily of me,
“ gentle Matilda. I wish to possess your
“ affection, to gain your heart. It is the pur-
“ suit of my life; the prize of my happiness.
“ Blame me not, if anxiety and doubt
“ sometimes prevail, and that, fearful of
“ my own demerits, I dread the loss of
“ that which is dearer to me than my ex-
“ istence.

"istence. I am sensible of your conde-
scension, and thank you for it: from
"my soul I thank you. The momentary,
"the transient pleasure I experience in the
"enjoyment of your company, is the ray
"of sunshine that gilds my days, and
"brightens the horrors that the apprehen-
"sion of not being agreeable to you sur-
"rounds me with. But even this is fatal
"to me: for I retire more enamoured from
"your presence; and every time I see you
"only serves to render it more impossible
"for me to live without you."

"Suppose, Mr. Benson, that I should
confess myself not indifferent to you,
"what could I hope from it? My aunt
"will never consent to our union; and will,
"perhaps, put a stop to it, by prejudicing
"my other guardian against you."

"Is not Sir Marmaduke Grigsby your
"guardian?

At that moment we were interrupted.
The most important, the most interesting

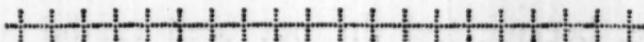
conversation I have yet had with her was most unhappily broke off by the entrance of Miss Clinton. No other opportunity had I of speaking to her that evening, except requesting her to fix a day to meet me again. She appointed next Tuesday: perhaps that day may make me blest, blest beyond my hopes, if it affords me the most distant prospect of being put into the possession of Matilda? That evening your letter, containing so many just reflections, came to my hands. I have paid that attention to it which your kind and friendly admonition so truly deserve. I have followed your advice, and examined my heart with a coolness and candour not common in men of my age. In the May of youth, I have looked forward into futurity, and find that my happiness is centered in Matilda. My reason approves a passion founded on the purest sentiments and the truest affection. Alike endearing will be

the

the sunshine of youth, or the winter of age that is spent with Matilda. Charming tho' her person is, and calculated to inspire love, it is not that alone which has enslaved my heart: her good sense and generous principles will create admiration when desire is no more.

Your's,

GEORGE BENSON.



LETTER LXXX.

To GEORGE BENSON, Esq.

WHEN I wrote to you last, dear Benson, I did not think the subject of my next epistle would have been so melancholy as it must be; but I will proceed regularly to inform you of what has happened.

The

The letter to Miss Whateley's brother was much better received than she expected it would be. His wife was dead; he had forgotten, and was willing to forgive her elopement from his family. She was desired to come and take the charge of his house upon her, and was assured that she should meet no reproaches for her former conduct. This letter she communicated to me, and accepted of my offer to convoy her down to her brother. This pleased me, because had she not been candid in the account she had given me of herself, I might have been able to have traced out where she varied from truth. Her consenting to it therefore was a testimony of her veracity. My addresses were more serious than before, and she very frankly acknowledged they were not disagreeable to her: assuring me, at the same time, that she would not forget my kindness in rescuing her from Mrs. Lewis. On our ar-

rival

rival at her brother's, she introduced me as a gentleman whom she was under many obligations to: and I was well received. I was obliged to sleep one night at his house: and obtaining permission to wait on her again, removed the next morning to Mrs. Thompson's. The servant who first appeared had such horror in his looks that astonished me.

"What's the matter, friend," said I,
"that you wear this look of affright."

"My master, Sir!" He could say no more.

"What is the matter with your mas-
ter?"

He had not time to answer my question, for Mrs. Thompson rushed out from an adjoining parlour: her eyes were swollen with tears: her face and manner were expressive of the agony of her mind.

"Oh, Mr. Hilgrove!—"

She

She had no further utterance: but clapping her hands together, she fell back into the arms of a servant. I ran to assist her. A young Lady, whose beauty was conspicuous even through her tears, sat in a corner of the room, senseless with grief, immoveable as a Niobe—all tears. This scene of distress and woe so unexpected, struck me with surprise. I had ever a great respect for the good old Lady, and Thompson was beloved by us both.

“For heaven’s sake explain to me this melancholy scene. What is the cause of this woe?”

“My master,” said one of the servants, “is dying. He received a wound last night, that the surgeons cannot cure.”

“Oh heaven’s! Can he be seen?”

“I believe he may.”

“Inform him I am here, and desire to see him. I would not surprise him by a sudden appearance.”

I followed the servant up stairs. My poor friend lay extended on the bed, pale, feeble, and ghastly : his hair clotted with blood, and his eyes almost sunk in eternal night.

"Friend of my youth," said he, with a low and broken voice, "thou art come to receive my parting breath. Come near me."

I approached him without speaking, and took his chilled hand between mine. I looked at him, but utterance for my melancholy sensations was denied me. He pressed my hand.

"It gives me great satisfaction to see you in this hour. Would to God my noble friend was here, that I might testify my regard and affection for him with my dying breath : but you can assure him that praying for his happiness and welfare were the employment of the latest moments of my life."

"He

"He is, and so am I sufficiently assured
"of your regard for us: but tell me, dear
"Thompson, tell me what was the cause
"of this melancholy, this dreadful scene."

" The story is too long to tell you
" now, but Lord Stanton will inform you
" of it all. I have written part of a letter
" to him, but have not been able to finish
" it. Enclose it to him when you ac-
" quaint him with my death. The part
" of the story he does not know I will
" endeavour to inform you of, if there
" is strength enough left. I have brought
" all the woes that have befallen me on
" myself. The indulgence of a passion,
" which I should have repelled and smo-
" thered in its birth, is the cause of my
" death. Yet death is pleasant to me,
" when it removes me from the reproaches
" I have so justly merited from those whom
" I have injured. The Lady, I suppose,
" you saw below —— Charlotte was,
" while I had life, the joy of my eyes, the
delight

“ delight of my heart, and could I form
“ a wish to live, it is only for her ; but the
“ first passion I had conceived was for ano-
“ ther, and she also lives ; lives to find
“ me faithless and perjured. She has re-
“ proached me with my conduct, and my
“ heart, which bears testimony to her merit,
“ and is conscious of the wrongs she has
“ suffered, could not support the charge.
“ The conviction of guilt was more than
“ I could bear. Ashamed and confused I
“ fled her presence, which I could not en-
“ dure. Who could have made her ac-
“ quainted with the defection of my heart
“ I knew not ; but it was not to be denied,
“ for it was true.”

“ Some enemy to my peace has created
“ me this uneasiness,” said I ; “ but per-
“ haps Charlotte knows not of my infide-
“ lity.”

“ My hope was vain : Charlotte re-
“ proached me also. He who could be
“ false to one would be unfaithful to all.

“ Her

" Her eyes no more beamed with kindness,
" no more the smile of love sat on her lips.
" Cold, estranged, averse, she refused to
" hear me plead my excuse. She would
" not even look on me. 'Twas the absence
" of the sun when all is darkness, night,
" and horror. My soul sunk in despair.
" In vain I importuned her to believe me
" true to her. She would not, and up-
" braided me with making her a partner
" in my guilt. The poor Louisa pines in
" solitude, forsaken and undone: she is
" imprecating curses on my head, as the
" seducer of the man she loves. Return,
" Mr. Thompson, to the feet of her, whose
" life depends upon the performance of
" your vows and promises."

" She would not permit me to speak.
" Rage took possession of my bosom. No
" longer was I guided by the dictates of
" prudence or discretion."

" It

"It is impossible for me to live," said I,
"while Charlotte frowns on me; but I
"will not die alone."

I made enquiries, and learned that Mr. Rogers had been here unknown to me, and had a private conversation with Charlotte: there was no room to doubt any longer. He had told her every thing, in order to render himself amiable in her eyes, and make her averse to me: that evening I learned he was again expected.

"He comes to triumph over me, to
"exult in my fall, to deprive me of my
"mistress and my happiness. Alas, there
"is no more happiness for me. He has
"poisoned her ear, and she no longer
"gives credit to what I say to her: she
"thinks that mine are the words of de-
"ceit. It is not to be born. And shall
"I not revenge myself upon the author
"of my miseries?"

I loaded

"It

I loaded my pistols, and hid myself in order to watch his coming. Charlotte had appointed to meet him in a field adjoining to the garden, where there was a little walk close to the hedge. I observed all her motions, and followed her unnoticed to the place of appointment, hiding myself behind the hedge, where I could overhear the greatest part of their conversation. It turned entirely on me, and the deserted and neglected Louisa. It seems that Mr. Rogers had made himself extremely busy in the affair, and carried messages between Louisa and Charlotte. I heard the latter assure him, that she would do every thing in her power to restore the former to her peace; and requested him to inform her of that resolution, and that she would never permit my addresses again. I know not what Rogers's reply to this was, for they were at a distance from me; but had that not been the case, so great was the tumult in my

bosom, that it deprived me of understanding. Rage, and a desire of revenge were all that I could turn my thoughts to. They soon after parted, and went different ways. I pursued the steps of Rogers, and soon overtook him.

"Stop," said I, "and face the man you have so basely injured."

"What want you?" demanded he, with an imperious voice.

"I want to tell you what a villain you are, who wantonly, and without provocation, seek so industriously to destroy my peace."

"I desire not to be interrupted," and he went forward.

"Infamous coward! who dare do a thing you are ashamed, or afraid to defend."

"This is language I cannot bear, and you will oblige me to pursue methods that I do not chuse."

"Here,

“ Here, here,” said I, producing the pistols, “ take your choice. One of us must fall ; either you who have treated me so ill, or I, who care not how soon I leave a world, which you have prevented my enjoying any happiness in.”

“ I want not to take your life.”

“ That is a mean, unmanly refuge. Oblige me not to use you as you deserve.

“ Then I must defend myself.”

He retired a small distance : we both fired together ; I wounded him slightly, whilst his hand had a surer and more determinate aim. I fell : he ran to me.

“ Good God,” said he, “ what has my rashness done ?”

“ Put me in an enviable condition. You will suffer from the reflection of your ungenerous deeds, whilst I shall sink into oblivion.”

“ Cursed be the hand that did it, and cursed was the advice that I followed.

Oh,

"Oh, Averston, what have you to answer for, and what hast thou brought upon thy unhappy friend!"

"Nothing: you have eased an unhappy man of his troubles, and given him that repose he has been long seeking. I forgive you, and if I live will take care to clear you of my death. Send some assistance to me, that I may not die here."

'He made no reply, but ran with all the speed he could, and soon sent some people to carry me home. What has since happened I know not: but in case he should be called to account for my death, I repeat to you that he is innocent of it, and I alone obliged him to what he did. I cannot hold it long; go to him and make him easy, it is my request: tell my much-loved generous friend, that I spoke of him with my dying breath. I know he will not withhold his bounty

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Oh,

'from my poor mother, who is now left
' destitute : farewell Hilgrove'.

He had exhausted himself in this narration, and fainted away. I thought he was no more: but upon proper assistance coming to him he was recovered, though after some time. He did not survive long: I received his last breath. It was the first time I had ever seen the soul and body part. 'Tis a dreadful change! the impression it made on me will not be easily effaced. But it affected me more strongly, when I considered the unhappy Thompson as my friend, one whom I had long known, and truly esteemed. The libertine should behold this scene, the wicked, the thoughtless and the profane. The report of death is like the sound of a storm heard at a distance, which affects us not: but should we all become witnesses to it, to behold the pangs of expiring nature, to see the struggles of departing life; every man would say, with Lear,

Thefe

These are messengers,
That feelingly persuade me what I am.

It is impossible to describe the scene of distress, this accident occasioned here. Mrs. Thompson I fear will not long survive her son, or give us an opportunity of shewing us how much we respected him, by the care we should take of her. Miss D——, who is not ignorant that she is the cause of this unhappy affair, is in as bad a state as his mother, who is also acquainted with share this unfortunate young Lady bore in it. I thought to have left this scene of desolation and sorrow: but soon found my presence absolutely necessary, for the guidance and comfort of this unhappy family. Mrs. Thompson was confined to her room: and every one was incapable of giving either directions, or performing them when given. Miss D—— was also in a state of stupid grief,

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grief, which prevented her taking notice of any object. I gave every order concerning my friend's interment, and resolved to pay him the last duties. As soon as he was dead I went to Mr. Rogers, though a stranger: having something to communicate to him from Mr. Thompson, I was admitted. The young gentleman testified his feelings and concern for what had happened, by the melancholy that was imprinted on his face, and the sorrow that was visible in his manner.

“ I have not the honour to be known
“ to you Sir, but the injunctions of my
“ departed friend occasioned this visit: with
“ his dying breath he cleared you, and
“ acknowledged you were forced to what
“ you did in your own defence. He de-
“ sired me to bear testimony of this de-
“ clarations in your behalf.”

I then

I then gave him my address, in case any thing should require him to call upon me.

"Sir," replied he, "this last action of your unhappy friend is of a piece with his other conduct; it is generous and brave: and I must take shame to myself for the hand I have had in the transactions that caused this unfortunate meeting. But remorse and repentance will follow the action to the latest hour of my life. My condition is more to be lamented than his, for my own reflections will never suffer me to rest: he is at peace. I have also many thanks to return you for the trouble you have taken, and so humanely endeavouring to ease my distracted mind on this occasion."

I told him that he was under no obligation to me, for I considered it as my duty: but begged, if he did not consider it improper, to resolve one doubt I

had. Nothing was there in which he would not oblige me.

“ Mr. Thompson mentioned part of
“ your conversation after he fell, in which
“ you accused some person of having ad-
“ vised you to this step: was it really
“ so, or did my unfortunate friend only
“ mistake?”

“ He was right, Sir: I did accuse—”
“ Lord Averston?”

“ Him—his fatal advice caused all this
“ mischief; I will read you his letter.”

He did so, and a most extraordinary epistle it was. It did not do much honour to his Lordship's principles. He added, when he had finished it, that he was very unhappy in having followed the advice it contained, which he should have cause to repent. Our conversation soon ended: I returned to the wretched family at this place. Last night I attended the funeral, and performed the last obsequies to my friend: I poured the

tribute

bute of tears on his grave, and sat down to give you this melancholly account. You may conclude that I have not had time enough to visit Miss Whately, so much has my time and attention been engrossed by this affair. Miss D——— proposes going from hence as soon as ever her health will permit. I cannot wonder at her desire of removing from a place, where every object will remind her of the death of the man she loved. Farewell, my good friend, and believe me

Truly your's,

JAMES HILGROVE.



LETTER LXXXI.

To ROBERT ASGILL, Esq.

SO many and various are the occurrences and incidents that I have met with, since I wrote to you, that when I attempt

to relate them, it bewilders me. And though they are of a nature that should, and do, affect me strongly, yet so quick has been their passage through my imagination, that my mind, with difficulty, traces them. Nevertheless, Asgill, I shall never forget them; for though I may retain a confused idea of them, yet the substance is not to be altered or erased. The last evening was that on which Matilda had appointed to meet me. She came according to her promise: and Miss Clinton, who was alone, excused herself from going with her mother to pay a visit, on purpose to receive us. Matilda's countenance shewed that something had affected her. Her eyes were dimmed with sorrow; grief and melancholly were visible in her face. The sight was dismal to me, who feel for her woes, and am affected by her griefs. I no longer thought of the pleasure her company afforded me. On the contrary, I sighed involuntarily, and longed to know
the

the cause of her uneasiness, whom my soul loved. Miss Clinton retiring, gave me the opportunity of enquiring into it.

“ Oh Matilda ! what is the cause of that cloud that obscures your beauties. Since I first beheld the appearance of sorrow in your countenance, my soul has taken a part in your calamities. Tell me, tell me what they are, that if I have not the power of relieving them, I may at least have the melancholy consolation of suffering along with you.”

“ I am obliged to you for your concern, Mr. Benson, and hope it is sincere. But it is out of your power to ease sorrows which you create.”

“ Not for the universe, Matilda, would I occasion you the slightest uneasiness. Do not cruelly accuse me of what I am not guilty of.”

“ It is too true, Sir.—The persecutions I suffer from my aunt, who suspects that my perseverance in constantly rejecting

“ Lord Averston’s suit, arises from parti-
“ ality in your favour ; the trouble he
“ gives me ; and my own conduct, which
“ has this appearance of guilt, all joining
“ together, are intolerable. Do you blame
“ me for shewing a sensibility that only in-
“ creases my distress ? It were happy for
“ me if I could not feel at all, instead of
“ feeling that which only serves to render
“ me miserable.”

“ I pity you from my heart, which par-
“ ticipates your griefs.—Yet, Matilda, is
“ there not a means of avoiding both the
“ persecution of your aunt, and the odious
“ addresses of a man you cannot entertain
“ a favourable opinion of ?”

“ Point it out to me, and let it be
“ consistent with my honour and reputa-
“ tion, and I will instantly follow it.”

“ Reward my passion, and consent to be
“ mine.”

“ Ah,” replied she, shaking her head,
“ that may be attended with more difficul-
“ ties

" ties than you are aware of. I was go-
" ing to inform you, when I saw you last,
" that I was not entirely in the disposal
" of Sir Marmaduke, my uncle. Mr.
" D'Aubigny, a gentleman whom my fa-
" ther repos'd the greatest confidence in,
" has the power of giving me away. Without
" his consent, it is impossible we should be
" united. If I apply to him, I know he
" will grant it. But how, how, Mr. Benson,
" shall I ask him? or for whom? Shall I
" tell him you are a stranger to me, and
" bid him apply to my aunt for the know-
" ledge of the person whom I am going to
" bestow myself on? Oh wretched and
" unhappy girl that I am!"

As she spoke, the big tear trickled down her cheek. My heart melted, it was dissolved in fondness and love. Yet it was but preserving the appearance of George Benson for a few hours longer, and I should be happy. I fell at her feet. So much

did the sight of her distress afflict me, that I could scarcely speak.

" Say any thing, Matilda, but what may affect my honour, my sincerity, and my love; the former is yet untainted, the latter shall ever be inviolable. Say that I, as well as the rest of mankind, am unworthy of possessing such exalted merit. Say that Fortune never repaired the injuries she has done, till this moment, in which she gives me a prospect of having obtained your good opinion. Believe that I am nothing worse than you see me, and when you find me deceive you, cast me off for ever."

" Rise, Sir, rise, this humiliating posture does not become you, nor is it fitting I should suffer it. He who may one day command me, should not kneel before me like a suppliant. I am carried to the brink of a precipice: and to leap it or run back, are equally dangerous. You see, Sir, I make you a witness

"ness of my weakness. You are a judge
"of my foibles. But—what shall I do?
"The struggle is too great to be sup-
"ported, and my heart will burst."

She hid her face from my sight, but the frequent heart-felt sobs indicated sufficiently the agony of her heart.

"Miserable am I, charming Matilda, if
"the cause of this grief to you.—Not a
"tear that falls from those eyes, but I
"would part with a drop of the blood that
"now throbs in my aching heart to pre-
"vent. But cease to afflict yourself, lovely
"maid. I will remove this trouble from
"you. Forget me, think no more of me.
"The passion which creates woe, and in-
"spires sorrow, is too dreadful to be har-
"boured. Forget me. I will fly from
"your sight. Enjoy happiness and peace.
"Leave misery and grief to me. Oh Ma-
"tilda, it is a bitter change to receive
"grief and misfortune for joy and felicity.
"Think no more of me: for you never
"can

"can esteem me while you entertain the
least doubt of my sincerity, or my
truth."

I paused—She remained silent a little while: She seemed as if collecting herself to address me.

"It is past," said she, while her manner displayed the conscious dignity of virtue; "the conflict is over.—Mr. Benson, you have conquered. I will believe your affe-
severations, I will give credit to your
vows. But consider. Do not deceive
me! Look on me as helpless, destitute;
an unfortunate orphan, who throws her-
self upon your protection, and who ex-
pects from your hands the determina-
tion of her future lot in life, either hap-
piness or misery. Your generosity, your
honour, your humanity, should take
my part, and prevent your deceiving or
forsaking her, who, won by your pro-
mises and vows, has placed the most un-
bounded confidence in you. But should
you

"you betray it, there is a power above us,
"who knows the innocence of my heart,
"and will take my part."

The solemnity of her address penetrated me. Conscious as I was of the uprightness and integrity of my intentions, yet I could not, for some time, command words to answer her. With broken sentences, and in a confused manner, I made a shift to explain my sentiments, and had the good fortune to assure her of my sincerity and truth. I pressed her trembling hand in mine, and endeavoured, in vain, to compose her. Her spirits had been too violently agitated to subside easily: frequent sighs burst from her surcharged bosom. She was, nevertheless, sensible of my tenderness, and returned it in such a manner as filled my bosom with rapture. All was transport and joy. She assured me that she would write to Mr. D'Aubigny, and entreated me to make myself agreeable to him, that she might justify her choice to so good a friend as the old,

old gentleman has been to her. I entreated her to delay a week longer, for by that time I should be better able than now to pay my respects to him; and perhaps also incline him to be more favourable to me. She cast a look at me, that seemed to indicate her fears: a sigh escaped her, and, with a fearful eye, she told me she had now put herself in my power, and must be guided by me. So absolute a reliance on me, shewed how much she regarded me: but the suspicion that accompanied it, hurt me, although I myself was the occasion of it. The hour of parting came, and I pressed the gentle Matilda to my enraptured bosom. She bid me adieu, and told me Miss Clinton would take care of any letters I might send before I saw her again. I returned to my lodgings, and there received a letter, giving me an account of the death of a man, whom you have heard me speak of as the friend of my youth. Unhappy Thompson! thou hast payed severely for

the indulgence of a passion that afforded thee nothing but misery. Lord Averston too was the great cause of it. The story is too long to tell thee now. Some other time you shall hear it. This account damped the pleasures, the interview with Matilda would have otherwise given me. I was to be excused if I gave a tear of sorrow to the memory of a friend I so truly loved. O'Reilly, who lives with me, was not within; and I sought retirement, as the most proper to indulge my thoughts, which were distracted. I went to bed, and meditated on what had past. There I formed my resolutions, and planned my future conduct. I spent the greater part of the beginning of the night in this employment, and, with difficulty, found rest in the morning. However, my mind, thus agitated and disturbed, wanted repose, yet I could not enjoy it; dreams of a distressing and disagreeable nature would not suffer me to sleep, and I rose early. A letter upon

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upon the table, addressed to me, first attracted my notice. I broke it open: it was from O Reilly. The contents astonished me—

“ My good friend must excuse me, if,
“ presuming upon his regard for me, I
“ have made so free, as to suppress a letter
“ directed to him. What demands a
“ greater apology is, that I have pre-
“ sumed to answer it. But you should re-
“ collect that Lord Averston and I have
“ an account to settle, and when that is
“ over, you are at liberty. If I should see you
“ no more, assure yourself I lived and died
“ your sincere and affectionate friend,

FELIX OREILLY.

The letter that enclosed, explained this affair—

“ Sir,
“ Though I generously made you ac-
“ quainted with my affection for Miss Con-
“ yers,

“yours; yet I find you have taken advantage of my openness, and are attempting to deprive me of the object of my love. A conduct so repugnant to the principles of honour and justice, requires immediate punishment; and I will so far demean myself, as to require that satisfaction which an injured man has a right to demand. The gentleman who delivers this will inform you that I shall be in Mary le Bone fields at seven tomorrow morning, and will settle the terms on which you will meet

“AVERSTON.”

This letter opened my eyes at once. But it was not proper that another should appear for me, when every thing I held dear to me was at stake, my honour and Matilda. With all the speed that I could make, I pursued my course to the spot where the combatants were. Though convinced that O Reilly's conduct sprung from

from an excess of friendship, yet such an imputation, as would be thrown on me for not answering this demand myself, was not tolerable. I happily arrived as they met. O Reilly and Lord Averston were in conversation when I came up.

"I am glad you are come," said the latter, "to prevent my treating you as you deserved."

"And I am glad to meet you face to face, to upbraid you with the duplicity of your conduct, your breach of truth, and your violated honour."

"I came not here to scold," replied he: — "To your ground."

Matters were speedily adjusted, and we fired at each other without effect. The other pistol was ready, when his friend and O Reilly came between us. They insisted that we had done every thing that was requisite, and insisted upon a reconciliation.

"Never, never, while he pretends to Matilda."

"Then

"Then our enmity must be everlasting," replied he, stalking off.

"Your Lordship will recollect a kind of promise you made me," said O Reilly.—"Besides, you have been after calling me some names that I do not like; therefore, if you please, no time is so good as the present for determining this matter. Here are both our friends by that will see fair-play.—And here is shillella."

He drew.

"You merit your death for your presumption."

Before we could run between them, they had exchanged a pass. We beat down their swords.

"O Reilly," said I, "you know the difference is not yet settled between his Lordship and me: you do not use me well, to take from me the opportunity of vindicating myself."

"Well,

"Well, I won't then," returned he, putting up his sword with much composure. "Upon my soul you'll give him enough of it."

They retreated to their carriages, and we parted as we met. In the way home O Reilly apologized to me for his conduct; but said, that he could not forgive his Lordship for his behaviour to him at Green Hill Park; and that there never could be so good an opportunity of coming at an explanation: that he had heard the whole affair from the Gentleman who brought the letter; and expecting me not to rise till it was all over, left his Lordship's billet inclosed as I found it.

"And now," said he, "I am very much rejoiced that you came yourself; but, had there been occasion, I would have done twice as much to serve you."

I

His

LORD STANTON. 71

His heart is good, and his intentions to oblige me deserve and meet my gratitude. I am tired. Adieu. Dear Asgill,

Yours,

GEO. BENSON.



LETTER LXXXII.

To Miss ATKINS.

WE are both deceived, Caroline. The good opinion we formed of the same person is erroneous. You have been only mistaken in him. Alas ! I am injured, exposed, and forsaken. But tho' my own folly and weakness brought these evils upon me, yet it is some consolation to think, that you were equally liable to have been imposed upon by his art ; and perhaps, had you the same temptation, like me you would have fallen. Yes, my dear Caroline, Mr. Benson has abandoned

ed

His

ed me to the horrors of self-accusation, and to my own reproaches. He has left me, after obtaining a confession of my tenderness for him; a confession that nothing but the hope of escaping my aunt's persecutions could have extorted from me. At the moment I made it, my prophetic soul presaged the consequence, and tears and sighs accompanied the fatal acknowledgment. Would he not, Caroline, have imposed upon any body? The artful delicacy of his manners, the apparent love of truth, his pretensions to honour, virtue, and honesty, all joined to a person and face that were agreeable beyond what we generally see, might have won upon one whose heart was not so easily softened as mine. When he spoke to me of his passion, his language was subtil and tender:

Into these ears of mine,
These credulous ears, he pour'd the sweetest words
That art or love could frame.

Alas!

Alas! I believed them; and he has left me shame, remorse, and repentance, for my companions. It is but three days, three short days ago, that these eyes saw him weeping in the agony of passion at my feet; that these ears heard him breathe the most solemn vows of truth, sincerity, and love. The sounds yet vibrate in my imagination, and I am again overcome by his pretended passion.

Last night Miss Clinton sent me the following letter, which he had enclosed to her. Read it, Caroline, and mark it well, that you may preserve it in your mind, to guard you from being enchanted by the flatteries of the perfidious sex.

“Enough has been paid to love: Honour now demands a tribute: her commands are too sacred to be disobeyed. I leave you, adorable Matilda—I leave you, perhaps but for a short time, to return more worthy your regard. It may

“ be we may never meet again. While I
“ write it, my hand trembles, my eyes
“ overflow with tears, and my heart is ready
“ to burst. I love you, Matilda, most
“ truly ; nor shall I cease to do so, till
“ death deprives me of my existence, and I
“ am no more.

GEO. BENSON.

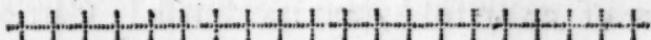
This is the letter. Give me patience ! He absolutely treats me as a servant : he discharges me from him : he leaves me only to get rid of me. The tears, the bitter tears of sorrow that flow while I write, are testimonies of my remorse and penitence. But what could he mean by pursuing me so long, and endeavouring to win my affection, if he designed only to forsake and desert me ? What pleasure could he have in rendering the future days of one who regarded him but too much, miserable ? It was wanton unmerited cruelty : but it may be, I judge amiss of him, and this

tribute he wishes to pay to honour, may be the occasion of his acting thus. Perhaps he has as great a regard for me as he has endeavoured to make me believe, and, conscious that the suspicions formed here of him are founded in truth, he will not embitter all my life with the reflection of my own folly in throwing myself away upon him, and therefore flies me. Perhaps it is the generous effort of an heart not totally abandoned, and, to convince me of the purity of his affection he will not suffer me to merit reproach by uniting myself with him. But why would he, when he knew his own circumstances and his condition so well, why would he seek to gain my affection when he was sensible he could not profit by it ? There is something extremely mysterious in his conduct, that I cannot explain ; but there is one part of it so plain and open that it requires no explanation ; and that is, his forsaking me. In the last interview I had

with him, when I mentioned my intentions of writing to Mr. D'Aubigny in his favour, he entreated me to delay it for some time, for reasons which he said he would hereafter acquaint me with. His behaviour was confused, perplexed; he could hardly speak to me. And this is the return I meet with for entertaining the most favourable opinion of this ungrateful man. Oh Benson, if thou knewst what a heart thou hast slighted, it might perhaps cost you a sigh! Wilt thou not do me the justness to confess, my sweet friend, that had his heart and principles corresponded with his outward appearance, he had been worthy esteem? he would, and I had been happy. The tears this discovery has cost me may serve as an atonement for my offence. Last night I closed not my eyes; the most tormenting thoughts and melancholy reflections were the companions of the hours of midnight. I want to hide my situation from my aunt;

but it is impossible : I want also to avoid Lord Averston ; they but increase my misery. My head is distracted, my eyes are so swollen that I can scarce see. This will be a sufficient apology to make thee excuse the errors of thy unhappy

MATILDA CONVERS.



LETTER LXXXIII.

To the same.

EVERY day heaps conviction on my head, shews me my own folly, and the necessity of my repenting it. I am punished for my weakness and obstinacy. I ought to have considered before I had lavished my regard on a man who was a total stranger to me. I should have seen whether the virtues he pretended to were real or not. My aunt, who has more experience and knowledge in the world than

E 3

I have,

I have, warned me against this man ; but I neglected her advice, and despised her admonitions. The consequence is, that I suffer severely. I merit it ! Caroline. The rash, the foolish, and the head-strong are generally punished by their own conduct. How could I pretend, silly, inexperienced girl that I am, to investigate the character of an artful hypocritical man ! Carried away by the stream of passion, was I a judge of his sincerity or truth ? No, ah, no ! His sighs and tears persuaded me of his love : they won my credulous heart. I believed him, and am wretched. Till this day I gave some degree of credit to his letter, where he talks of returning. I considered him in a light which he does not deserve to be looked upon in. I Thought there might be some sparks of honour yet remaining unextinguished in his bosom, and fancied that he might perhaps verify his words. That hope is now extinct : but yet I cannot banish his idea

from

from my mind ; the first tender sentiments I ever formed are not so easily to be eradicated. The impression is deep, and I fear will be lasting. What scenes of exalted happiness had my imagination painted ! What delight had I not promised myself in the society of the sensible, elegant Benson ! The delusion is vanished, and the dream that my mind was wrapt in is passed away. But my bosom is no longer the habitation of peace and indifference. My days are melancholy, my nights are sleepless. I am ashamed of my weakness and credulity, and even when alone blush, for having ever acknowledged a tenderness for a man who was capable of using me so basely. How happy are they whose feelings are deadened, who know not an excess of sensibility, the most dreadful misfortune ! It is want of it that creates and ensures happiness.

Nor ease nor peace that heart can know,
That, like the needle true,
Turns at the touch of joy and woe,
But turning trembles too.

That is my case. I was not insensible to the calls of humanity before, but now my heart is softened, even beyond my sex's tenderness, and every misfortune is become my own. This is the bitter cup of adversity which I vainly hoped I should never taste.

Yesterday Lady Wilmington sent her compliments, and begged me to be at home at an hour which she appointed this morning, and to be alone; as she had business of the most important and interesting nature to communicate to me. My acquaintance with her Ladyship was extremely trifling, and how she could be concerned in any thing that interested me, I knew not; but I resolved to see her, and returned for answer, that she might be

be assured I would wait at home as she desired. I confess, my curiosity was greatly excited, and I impatiently waited her coming. I grew uneasy when she staid half an hour beyond the appointed time. At length she came. Her Ladyship is a gay woman, and allows herself all those indulgencies which married women of fashion assume. This was one reason why I was not desirous of having any great intimacy with her. After the first and common salutations between those who are not very familiar, she addressed me,

“ I doubt not, Miss Conyers, but you
“ were very much surprised at receiving a
“ note from me.”

“ As I had not the honour of being
“ well known to your Ladyship, I could
“ not tell what to think of it.”

“ I suppose so; and even now I ought
“ to make an apology for concerning my-
“ self in your affairs; but the cause of
“ honour, justice, and humanity must ex-

"cuse my breaking through the rules
"which ceremony prescribes."

"It is very sufficient justification for
"your Ladyship's conduct."

"You will think it so, I am sure, when
"you are acquainted with the motive of
"my visit. It is the cause of injured in-
"nocence: it should be made our sex's
"quarrel, and every one of us should be
"concerned in revenging it."

"I shall not shew myself averse to do-
"ing every thing in my power to help the
"oppressed and injured, but I must be
"acquainted with the offender and the of-
"fence."

"You shall know both, though the for-
"mer may be one whom you regard, and
"in the explanation of the latter I may be
"partly concerned: though an unhappy
"relation of mine is a principal, yet eve-
"ry thing shall be done to give you the
"satisfaction you require; and if I can be
"instrumental in saving the much-admired

"Miss

" Miss Conyers from ruin, and the arms
" of a man who deserves the hatred of our
" sex, I shall think no sacrifice too great."

My heart foretold the residue of the discourse, though I could not conceive how her Ladyship knew of Mr. Benson's paying his addresses to me, unless he had ungenerously taken the pains to publish my shame, and boast of the partiality I had shewn him. These reflections kept me silent for a moment.

" Your Ladyship talks so mysteriously,
" that it is impossible for me to understand
" you. I wish you would be more ex-
" plicit."

" I will. The late affair that happen-
" ed has been much spoken of, and your
" name frequently mentioned."

I was ready to die, Caroline : this speech confirmed my suspicions, and I no longer hesitated to pronounce him the most ungrateful and deceitful of mankind. I had hardly power to ask her,

"What affair, my Lady, has happened,
"that my name is mentioned in?"

As this was spoken with some degree of warmth, her Ladyship seemed surprised.

"Really I could not believe you were
"a stranger to it: I mean the duel that was
"fought a few days ago, between Lord
"Averston and Mr. Benson upon your
"account."

"I assure you solemnly, Lady Wil-
"mington, this is the first I ever heard of
"it; and am very sorry to think my name
"should be the topic of public conversa-
"tion, because two gentlemen had an en-
"mity to each other."

"You know, Miss Conyers, that com-
"mon fame is generally very busy upon
"these occasions, and she has not been
"idle on this; you are supposed to be
"the reward of the conqueror."

"I am exceedingly unhappy that such
"a thing should be; but pray, Madam,
"inform me if either of them is hurt."

"Not

" Not that I heard of, Madam."

" It gives me pleasure: but what am I to learn from this, more, than some malevolent persons have been making more free with my name than they had a right to do?"

" Yes, Miss Conyers, there is yet more, and what that is, causes this visit to you. Mr. Benson has been pointed at as the man who is paying his addresses to you; this late affair confirms it. Mr. Benson is a stranger in this town, so great a one that I believe I can claim and prove the earliest acquaintance with him. Some trifling civilities he rendered our family at an inn where we were obliged to put up, recommended him first to my father's notice. He was received at our house as one of the family, and his reception there was such as his subsequent behaviour proved he had not merited. You have seen him, Madam, and I know him. I need not there-

" fore

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“ fore tell you that his manners are en-
“ gaging, his person is agreeable, and there
“ is every semblance of virtue in his de-
“ portment that could render him estima-
“ ble in the eyes of our credulous sex.
“ He then represented himself as a coun-
“ try gentleman, a perfect stranger to Lon-
“ don, or its crimes. The former I will
“ believe, but not the latter. He once,
“ Madam, did me the honour of think-
“ ing me worthy his regard. I am not
“ culpable if I confess, that he was far
“ from being disagreeable to me. I
“ thought him what he appeared to be,
“ and depended on the sincerity of his
“ heart, and the simplicity of his man-
“ ners. This delusion lasted a long
“ while, and I was tempted to believe
“ from his professions and vows that I had
“ entire possession of his heart. Nay, so
“ much was I prejudiced by his art, that
“ I treated my present husband, who was
“ paying his addresses to me, so ill,
“ that

“ that nothing but the extraordinary affection he had conceived for me could have made him support the bad treatment he met with at my hands. In short, I was the dupe of his artifice and perfidy, when the appearance of a new face broke the charm, and the delusion, however agreeable to me, vanished. Well for me that it did, that I did not suffer more than the mere experience of his ingratitude and baseness. My unfortunate cousin met a severer fate : her he ruined, deserted, and destroyed. She was more credulous than I was, of an easier temper, and innocent of guilt—“ Poor Arabella !”

She wept, Caroline : the remembrance of the wrong done to her kinswoman by the designing Benson, brought tears into her eyes. The comparison affected me so nearly that I sympathized in her grief. After some pause she continued :

“ You

“ You will excuse me, Miss Conyers,
“ if I cannot refrain from shewing my
“ sorrow at the fate of my wretched cou-
“ sin. It seems, that whilst he pretended
“ to pay his addresses to me, he was also
“ endeavouring to persuade Mrs. Adder-
“ ley, that he was fond of her; he suc-
“ ceeded but too well. He seemed to pay
“ her the compliment of leaving me upon
“ her account. The sacrifice was pleasing
“ to her unthinking vanity, and she re-
“ warded it. I saw through his villainy
“ and artifice; however, not before it was
“ too late to warn the unhappy object of
“ his base designs from trusting too much
“ to him. At that time I bestowed my
“ hand upon Sir Edward. Mr. Benson was
“ extremely piqued at this conduct as I have
“ reason to imagine from the consequence,
“ for he never visited at our house after-
“ wards, great as the obligations were
“ which he had to us, and much as our
“ carriage to him merited a better return.

“ At

“ At that time too, Mrs. Adderley departed suddenly out of town, without taking her leave of any body. This extraordinary proceeding surprised me greatly: nor could I account for it in any manner till lately, when I received a letter from a young lady in the country, who was her friend, and acquainted with the whole transaction, informing me, that she was dead, and had left a letter to be given into Mr. Benson’s own hands; and not knowing where to find him had directed her to me to give her some information concerning him. My answer afforded her very little satisfaction, for I could give her no account of him; but it was the means of my learning the truth of what I now acquaint you with. I also learned further, that Mrs. Adderley had been brought-to-bed of a fine boy which she nursed in a very private manner, but that the sense of her own shame and

“ miscon-

“ misconduct, and Mr. Benson’s barbarous
“ treatment of her, had caused such an
“ alteration in her spirits, and affected her
“ so much, that she could not brook it,
“ but declined every day, and at last died
“ of a broken heart. I had endeavour-
“ ed by every means in my power to learn
“ where Mr. Benson was, but met with
“ no success, till the late report informed
“ me he was paying his addresses to you.
“ To warn you against his arts, to give
“ you notice of his actions, occasioned
“ this visit to you, Madam; and from the
“ goodness of my intentions I hope you
“ will excuse the trouble I have given
“ you.”

“ I am infinitely indebted to your Lady-
“ ship, and esteem the favour as I ought.
“ I should have been happier if I had
“ known it before.”

“ God forbid, that you should also be
“ a sufferer by his villainy. In what man-
“ ner can his art affect you?”

This

This question brought me a little to my recollection, and made me repent my hastiness in making known to any body whom I was so little acquainted with, the more immediate concerns of my heart. I was ashamed of having said so much; but it was not to be recalled, and I was to avoid explaining myself further than I chose.

"I hope not, Madam," said I; "and "I can only be affected by the disagreeable report this affair will make about "the town."

This answer did not satisfy her, and she endeavoured by many artful questions to draw a secret from me that I was determined to keep. This reserve did not seem to please her: however, to give me a proof of her regard for me, and the truth of her assertions, she promised to procure me the letter this lady wrote to him in her last moments, and that she would confide in me to deliver it into his hands. I excused

excused myself from this employment in the best manner I could. She then assured me, that if I would not undertake it, I should have notice whenever it was delivered to him. This visit lasted more than two hours, and she did not leave me without assuring me of her friendship, and recommending to me to beware of Mr. Benson's arts.

It was needless, Caroline, now: the snare was laid, and the poor bird was caught. Into what hands am I fallen! Pity me, Caroline, but do not despise me for being so easily imposed upon. I know not whence the sentiment arises, but there appeared to me a great deal of design in Lady Wilmington's manner. She wanted to prejudice me against this man: but if the accusations against him are true, there is no occasion for it. He delights in perfidy, and triumphs in the misery of our sex. He has obtained his ends, for he has made me wretched, most wretched. Adieu,

dieu, Caroline, and believe me thine unhappy friend,

MATILDA CONYERS.



LETTER LXXXIV.

To the same.

I Have no other relief for my distracted mind, than writing to you, my dear Caroline. My good friend, Miss Clinton, has been out of town for some days, and is now returned. She went with her mother to the house of a Lady in the country, to fetch a young Lady home with them, who is their distant relation. It seems, a young gentleman, son to the person whom she lived with, paid his addresses to her, and that a rival of his killed him; and, as Fanny Clinton says, the whole affair was occasioned by Lord Averston. The old Lady made it a request, she would leave a spot,

spot, where her melancholly would be eternally nursed by the sight of places and things she had been accustomed to, and Mrs. Clinton and her daughter went to bring her to town. It seems the gentleman, who was the party, accuses Lord Averston for having given him advice so destructive, and severely blames himself for pursuing it. How am I situated! He whom my heart and reason approve, flies me. He who is obnoxious to both, pursues me without intermission. Yet more, Caroline,

For sorrows come, they come not single spies,
But in battalions.

My aunt has heard of this unfortunate duel. She has accused me as a party concerned, and says the most injurious things imaginable. She exalts her favourite's character, while she takes every method of depreciating Mr. Benson's.

"How

"How dares such a fellow raise his hand against the life of his superior?"

I know not why he did it, but sure he ran an equal risque. I have been thinking frequently, since this piece of intelligence was communicated to me, what could induce him to put his life in hazard for one whom he designed to forsake. It is unaccountable, and his actions must answer for themselves. But my aunt is preparing more plague for me. She tells me she will acquaint Mr. D'Aubigny with the whole affair, and apply to him in behalf of Lord Averston. I must confess I should be sorry that good man knew my weaknesses, or that I must be obliged to appear in the humiliating posture before him, which my misconduct will oblige me to. Perhaps my aunt may have influence enough over him to persuade him to join her in favour of Lord Averston. How shall I be able to refuse the solicitations of a man, whom I have ever looked upon with the utmost

most reverence? or how shall I disobey commands that have the weight of parental authority? Yet I cannot like Lord Averston, I cannot even have a friendship for him. There is something in him which my nature shrinks from: and why, I cannot tell. All I hope for is, that Mr. D'Aubigny will not lay his commands upon me to accept a man for a husband I have so great a dislike to. Let me have rest and peace, and I will live as I am. He who won my heart, who first awakened my tenderness, who shewed the pleasures of a mutual affection, has left me, has abandoned me. Henceforth I will be cautious, be prudent. Will be warned by the misfortune I have already experienced, and trust to them no more. No more will I ever listen to Mr. Benson; the character Lady Wilmington has given him, and his treatment of me, forbid that. Never will I hear him, never shall he impose on me again. This is

my

my solemn resolution, and if I maintain the same opinion that I am now of, he shall never see me again if I can help it. I will add, not without reason, that I will not be cheated by any of his sex. Come, then ! in the room of those disagreeable passions, that have so lately distracted my bosom, instead of hope, fear, anxiety, and love, come indifference, come insensibility ! from you alone I must seek that peace I have lost.

The tears which pity taught to flow,
My eyes shall then disown :
The heart which throbb'd for others woe,
Shall then scarce feel its own.

The wounds which now each moment bleed,
Each moment then shall close,
And peaceful days shall still succeed
To nights of calm repose.

That is the enviable state, Caroline, I wish to attain. But before I arrive at that,

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Benson

Benson must be no more remembered. I must forget his apparent sincerity, honour, and truth. I must forget his attracting form and engaging manners. I must not recollect his vows of affection, of unalterable affection, which he made. But, above all, I must forget the effect they had upon the weak, the credulous, the foolish Matilda. It is a painful task, Caroline. Every night recalls him to my distracted imagination in my dreams, and my roving fancy settles daily on him. Cannot the tears I hourly shed, wash him from my remembrance? Will he ever hang over my mind as a beacon to warn me from trusting to man again? I must seek some other habitation, London will not do. He will thrust himself in my way. He will meet my eyes in every place, and force me, through conscious shame, to fly the paths he haunts. I cannot long support this state of doubt and anxiety, for I must lament that I had
ever

I
ever seen a man who has been so fatal
r, to my repose. And yet I ought to re-
g joyce that he has not the same cause of
ot triumph over me as he had over others.
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Your's ever,

MATILDA CONYERS.



LETTER LXXXV.

To WILLIAM ROGERS, Esq.

I Believe it will do at last, dear Rogers.

— Quid optanti divum promittere nemo
Audiret, volvenda dies en! Attulit ultró.

Fortune, thou propitious deity, how I
adore thee! For all the slights she has
shewn, she has repaid me at last. One
smiling moment has made me forget all her
frowns. Yes, Rogers, no less than the
possession of the land flowing with milk
and honey, the charms of Matilda and

the gold of Ophir can satisfy me now. No longer the despairing, doubtful, fearful lover, behold me in another character; successful, triumphant, and ready to enjoy the fruit of all my pains, all my trouble. Yes, the stubborn lovely girl bends before me, and a few days will put me in a situation truly enviable. Thou wilt never succeed, Rogers: you have only one plan, I have many. But why art thou so phlegmatic and dull, as not to write to me? I am half inclined to be angry with you; if my spirits were not so elevated, I certainly should. Hast thou no curiosity to learn how this unexpected alteration was brought about? I know thou hast, and shalt not be disappointed.

This head, Rogers, this head, and the assistance of dame Fortune in a good humour, did it all. When I left Greenhill Park, all was in confusion; Madam in the dumps, stubborn, pouting, and obstinate: she would hardly look at or speak to me.

Lady Grigsby's lectures, or her husband's advice, operated very little in my favour. There was but little hope for me. In a short time after we arrived in town, Benson came also. My spies were well informed of his motions, and he saw Matilda twice in private. This confirmed my suspicions, that he had been in the country, and had either seen or corresponded with her there. It would not do to trifle any longer; and I sent a friend to him. We met, but no hurt was done. This affair made a noise; and I was not sorry for it: for I took care also to have the cause of it known. The name of an affair of honour with a woman, prevents any interlopers from running in and catching up the game, when you have almost run it down. Lady Wilmington, a fine woman, Rogers, happened to be at a house where I was paying a visit. I was tolerably well known both to her and her husband. There was a good deal of com-

pany, and they divided into parties. Lady
Wilmington singled me out.

“ I congratulate you,” said she, “ on
“ your escape from this late affair. If your
“ antagonist is as much to be feared by the
“ men as the women, he is a powerful ad-
“ versary.”

“ He is a man of honour, I believe;
“ but what reason have you to suppose he
“ is so terrible? He is a handsome fellow,
“ I am sure.”

“ He is the more to be dreaded there-
“ fore.”

“ What, have you felt his power?”

“ Humph—No—but I could tell who
“ has.”

“ Let me hear it, dear Lady Wilming-
“ ton.”

“ It is a secret.”

“ Oh, you may trust me: I am as silent
“ as death upon these occasions. But if
“ you are interested in the matter, you
“ have

"have now a fine opportunity of being re-
"venged on him for his villainy."

"How, dear Lord Averston, tell me
"how."

Revenge is a sweet nut to a female tooth; and I saw that her Ladyship seemed well-disposed to put any thing in execution I should devise. It was therefore my business to open my intentions with caution.

"There is a method of disappointing his
"hopes, and defeating his wishes, of
"making him repent his evil deeds, by
"depriving him of all that is dear to him;
"but perhaps you want resolution to do
"such a thing."

"Put it in my power, and then see whe-
"ther I want resolution, or not."

"Are you interested in the affair?

"Nearly.

"What was his crime?

"Seducing and relinquishing an unhappy relation of mine, whose life was the sacrifice to his barbarity."

"That was bad: but was there not a report, that he was once the victim of your charms?"

"There was some truth in it—But explain yourself."

"If Miss Conyers knew the particulars of the affair, I am sure she would never see him again."

"You may be mistaken: perhaps she may like him the better."

"Many of her sex would; but she is not one of them. It would ruin him in her good opinion for ever."

"It shall be done; I will write to her."

"The worst scheme in the world: a letter won't be believed."

"What shall I do then?"

"If the story you have to tell her be true, you need not be ashamed of declaring it to her yourself, if it is not, I would not have you mention it at all."

She assured me it was; and, to convince me, acquainted me with the names of the parties,

parties, and the whole transaction ; relating also the part she bore in it. This was sufficient proof to me ; and we put our heads together, to settle in what manner this should be made known to Miss Conyers. The train was laid, and she went to Matilda, whose credulity easily swallowed the pill, gilded as it was. Lady Grigsby has been informed of it, you may be sure. This affair, so well authenticated, impeaches the moral character of Benson so strongly, that Matilda can no longer form any excuse to keep him with her, or permit his addresses. Her aunt intends writing to her guardian, to inform him of this matter, and solicit his interest in my behalf, to prevent her niece from being ruined. Benson has not been seen for some time : I suppose he has received his order of dismission. If so, I promise, without vanity, I am next in succession : and, with the power I have over Sir Marmaduke and his wife, I do not despair of success. As for the

Lady herself, she is in the pouts upon this account of her lover's bad character: for she expects her husband to be like one of the heroes of old romance. This is my turn now to win her good graces: for I have appeared all along what I am not; and by pretending to be virtuous, arrive at the end of my wishes, and obtain the reward that should attend on the reality. But I only follow the custom of the world. Loud hypocrisy out-bellowes real piety: and he who has least merit succeeds, by pretending to it, better than the true possessor. Once more I desire you to write to me.

Farewell.

AVERSTON.

LET-

LETTER LXXXVI.

To JASPER D'AUBIGNY Esq.

SIR,

THOUGH you have made yourself a stranger in my house, and through your aversion to me have neglected the care of your ward's and relation's interest, yet I cannot carry my resentment so far as you have done; but, though sensible of having been ill treated by you, yet I will wave every matter that may have happened, in order to promote her welfare and happiness. This then, Sir, gives you a cordial invitation to this house which you have so long forsaken, and to beg of you, if not upon our accounts, at least upon the account of Matilda, to renew your intimacy here, to consult the most proper measures for her future establishment in life. A match has been proposed to her

honourable and advantageous in every respect. A nobleman of interest and rank has been her admirer for some time; and I should imagine, by the encouragement she has given him, that she is not averse to an union with him. The sooner this matter therefore is put upon a sure foundation, the better it will be for us all; as you are sensible that women will sometimes prefer what may please their eyes, to what is most beneficial to them in other respects. There should therefore be no time lost. I am sure the regard you have for the family will induce you to join in any matter that may tend to the general benefit of it. Sir Marmaduke joins me in presenting you with his best wishes; and I remain, Sir,

Your affectionate friend and

humble Servant,

F. GRIGSBY.

L E T.

LETTER LXXXVII.

To ROBERT ASGILL, Esq.

I KNOW not what worse fate can attend me than that I have experienced. Oh, Asgill I am undone! all the fond hopes which my heart had formed are disappointed, all the tender scenes of happiness, which my sanguine imagination had already planed, are frustrated. When I wrote to you before, all was love, harmony and joy. I yet remember the delightful delusion with pleasure, and endeavour to retrace those sensations that afforded me so much happiness when they existed. They are now no more. I am awakened from the dream of rapture, to experience the reality of woe, sorrow, and slighted love. To add to the misery of my situation, and encrease the poignancy of my grief, my heart was buoyant with hope, my mouth was full of good tidings to

to communicate to my Matilda; to pour out the tide of joy before her, was my desire and intention. But some public or private enemy has prejudiced her against me, and she refuses to see or hear from me, Surely, surely she could not, did not love, or she would not so easily reject me. But I will relate what happened, and you shall judge for yourself. After being forced by Lord Averston to defend my honour in a public engagement with him, I was sensible the world would be no stranger to that affair, or my affection to Miss Conyers. As the latter was the cause of the former, it was a fit subject to be handled by all the idlers in the town, and would soon be the theme of conversation at the public places. I was reduced to my *dernier resort*; for though the privacy in which I lived would have baffled and disappointed the enquiries of the most curious, yet I was concerned on Matilda's account, as well

as

as my mother's, whose uneasiness would be very great if this affair should come to her knowledge, without her being assured of my safety. Another circumstance: my mind, agitated by various hopes and fears, had been totally engaged for some time past, in contriving the means, to disappoint my rival, or win Miss Conyers's affection. The last interview I had with her convinced me of my success, and that I had inspired her heart with the tender passion. My bosom was no longer the seat of anxiety upon that account, and my thoughts only turned on the methods I should pursue to secure my happiness. While I was thus employed, my present situation first occurred to me: and I could not help thinking, that my regard for Matilda wore the appearance of interest, more than was consistent with my passion or my sentiments. The many allusions she had made, in the course of my correspondence

dence with her, concerning my deficiency in point of fortune, though they affected me for the moment, and gave me hopes that, even when she was acquainted with the disparity of our circumstances, she would not esteem me the less, were but transitory impressions; and escaped my remembrance, when my faculties were all employed in concerting the means to obtain her. The calm that now succeeded to those storms, gave me time and leisure to reflect on these circumstances. My passion was crowned with her approbation, and my vows were repayed. But while I was endeavouring to render her susceptible of the noblest passion the human heart is capable of receiving, would it not appear evident to any unconcerned person that I had only regard to my own interest, and was striving to gain her affections, to prey upon her fortune? I was astonished at the retrospect of my conduct. How unworthy of her or myself!

how

how much like a sharper! the reflection was intolerable. Because, though the reality was the farthest of any other earthly consideration from my thoughts, yet the semblance was so striking, that it had been an impossibility to persuade the world to the contrary. Though there was no foundation for such an opinion, yet it would have hurt my delicacy, and destroy'd my peace. I should have looked upon myself as selling my honour, and bargaining to share the dignity of my rank and title for a sum of money. The more I reflected upon this matter, the more disagreeable it was to me: and I could place it in no light that could render it otherwise. Though the knowledge of the world may make us acquainted with evil, yet it is of service, when it inspires us with a proper horror of it, or prevents the commission: this will be the effect it must always have upon an heart thoroughly fortified with constancy and fortitude

titude to oppose the temptations that are hourly offered us. A knowledge of what is a crime, will hinder us from being ignorantly guilty. Did I require nothing but the testimony of my own heart, I should obey the dictates of the passion it is filled with: and the purity and sincerity of my love, would overcome every other consideration. But other things were to be considered, and love alone would not ballance public censure, or my private unhappiness, the consequence of it. It would have been in vain to have said that, could we change situations, I would have acted by her as she did by me: it would have been considered as an idle boast, when not put to the proof. These were my reflections, these my thoughts, when I had discovered my passion was returned, and my affection repaid; it took me much time to resolve how to act. At one moment I was tempted to lay myself at her feet
and

and discover myself, at another I thought it better to see my mother first, and inform her of my situation. The latter I adhered to. A letter was written, to acquaint Lady Stanton of my design to see her shortly, lest she should be too much surprised at my sudden appearance. This affair was easily settled: but how should I quit Matilda? That was a more difficult task: but I was determined to go down to Stanton hall, and nothing should prevent me. I sent a note to Matilda, couched in the most mysterious terms concerning my absence, but expressive of my sincere affection.

"It will puzzle her for a short time," said I to myself; "the explanation of "it will be attended with happiness and "joy."

I flung myself into the carriage that was to convey me to my mother, and proceeded on my journey. Every mile I removed further from the place where

Matilda

Matilda was, my uneasiness encreased, I feared a thousand things that I could hardly form an idea of. Fears which have since been realized! I was tempted to return, and not quit the spot where my heart's only treasure was deposited. Shall I tell you, I had formed a most romantic scheme, if my journey had not been successful. Yes, Asgill, I would have banished myself from all enjoyment, would have fled the place of my nativity, would have bade adieu to liberty, happiness, and Matilda at once, rather than have suffered her to entertain the smallest notion derogatory to my honour. This was my resolution. Something whispered peace to my breast. But it was a voice too low to be heard or regarded amidst the tumultuous passions that contended for the mastery in my bosom. Two days travelling, in which I neither slept nor eat, added to the uneasiness I suffered the whole time, changed my countenance,

tenance, and damped the joy that would otherwise have been general upon my return. My mother, the most tender, affectionate parent, was frightened at my appearance.

"Ah, Edward," said she, the tears starting from her eyes, which beheld me with grief and concern, "what is the occasion of this alteration? where is the glow of health that virmillioned thy cheeks when you left me? you are pale, my child, your eyes bespeak sorrow. Tell me, tell me what disturbs you."

"Pardon me, dearest, most honoured parent. Pardon my rashness and folly, which have been the means of making you unhappy. Do not distress yourself, though you see me altered. I confess that my mind is not perfectly at ease, and that occasions this change in me."

"Then

“ Then will you not acquaint me with
“ the cause? can you have a friend more
“ truly interested in your welfare than I
“ am, one who loves you better, or
“ would do more to serve you?”

“ Press me not, madam, to accuse my-
“ self, and perhaps make me guilty of
“ censuring even you. Did you not bid
“ me go into the world? did you not
“ describe the advantageous which would
“ arise from my undertaking? but why
“ did you not tell me that I should be
“ unhappy.”

“ Ah, my child how could I foresee
“ that? but while you make me instru-
“ mental to your unhappiness, you raise my
“ curiosity to know the cause of it: ex-
“ plain yourself, and perhaps I may re-
“ medy the evil I have so innocently oc-
“ casioned.”

I have scarce room in this paper to bid
you farewell.

GEORGE BENSON.

LETTER

LETTER LXXXVIII.

To the same.

I Will continue the conversation which I was obliged to break off so abruptly in my last.

" Why should I acquaint you with my " troubles, Madam, when they will only " serve to render you uneasy! Let me " bury them in silence, without having the " mortification of reflecting, but that I " have been the means of disturbing the " repose of the best of mothers."

" This will encrease my suspence and " my misery. I conjure you, Edward, " reveal the secrets of your heart to me."

Her solicitations prevailed. I related my life since I saw her, with the most circumstantial fidelity. I concealed nothing from her. The different sensations she expressed at the various parts of my story, affected me strongly. Maternal tenderness

derness overcame every thing else: and she pardoned my errors, while she delicately pointed them out. When I was obliged to relate my affair with Lord Averston, she trembled at the danger to which I had been exposed, and longed to thank O Reilly for the friendship he proved to have for me. Her questions concerning Matilda were numerous and penetrating. There was nothing in the lovely girl's character or conduct that ought to be concealed. I answered them all with that precision and truth that forces conviction. It was the subject nearest my heart, and I delighted in dwelling on her good qualities. I at length came to express my scruples, and the cause of my retiring so abruptly from London, informing her of the scheme I had proposed and resolved to adhere to.

“ Now, Madam,” said I, concluding my narrative, “ you have been informed of “ every thing that has befallen your un-
“ happy

" happy son—Unhappy only in the want
" of that equality of fortune, that would
" render me a suitable match for Miss Con-
" yers. So great is my affection that I
" shall be miserable without her; so de-
" licate my love, that I cannot bear the
" least reflection should be thrown on me,
" or on her. I am afraid that I shall make
" you uneasy also upon my account, be-
" cause you have not the power of reliev-
" ing me: but to whom can I with more
" propriety reveal my situation and senti-
" ments? Yet, yet, Madam, it will add
" to my grief, and encrease my concern
" to think that I have made you unhappy
" also."

" Let not that consideration distress
" you, my child: the shoulders that are
" accustomed to bear a burthen, can sup-
" port the weight with greater ease than
" those which are not. You know I have
" endured some troubles in your father's
" time which will better enable me to
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" support those of my child : but let us
" indulge these melancholy reflections no
" longer at present. It is late : you want
" rest : retire for this night, and let us re-
" sume the subject in the morning."

She embraced me tenderly as she left me. My soul was softened by maternal tenderness, and I felt sensations which almost unmaned me. Fatigue made me rest, I sunk into sleep : but even then the beloved image of Matilda represented itself to my yet active fancy, and she was the companion of my slumbers. My uneasiness was forgotten for a moment, and the society of the idol of my heart gave me happiness. I awoke in the morning with my powers thoroughly restored, and returning thanks to the beneficent being who poured his blessings upon me, acknowledging my gratitude for those I had received, and supplicating a continuance of them, I hastened to meet my mother. That worthy woman, though

advanced in years, has, by persevering in a life of temperance and regularity, so far successfully opposed the advances of age, as to retain her bloom in some degree, and her vigour and activity. And though really in the winter of life, she appears only to have entered the autumn of it. She was up as soon as I was, and ready to receive me. As my rest had restored me, she congratulated me on my appearance :

“ But yet you do not look as well as I wish you.”

“ When the heart is not at ease, Madam, the countenance will be clouded.”

“ Then you don’t forget our last night’s conversation.”

“ It is impossible I ever should.”

“ Well,” said she, “ don’t let us spoil our appetites for breakfast with disagreeable reflections : when that is over we will chat about this matter.”

When we had finished our morning's repast, she took me up into her closet.

"Edward," said she, "the account you gave me last night, and the effect I see it has upon you, must give me uneasiness, if it is to be supposed that I take any interest in the welfare of my son, my only child, who is not only dear from his relation to me, but also from his virtues. The considering your story has taken me up the greater part of the night, and to ease you of your embarrassments, and to procure you the enjoyment of your wishes, I am determined to do every thing in my power to serve you."

I interrupted her.

"Ah, Madam, you shall make no sacrifices to me. I will not consent that you should lessen the conveniences or happiness of your life upon my account: let me rather suffer."

"Hear

" Hear me patiently, and I will explain
" matters to you. I doubt not your ge-
" nerosity or your affection; but I hope
" you will not be obliged to put either
" of them to the test upon this occasion.
" To make you understand me clearly, it
" is necessary I should begin from the time
" I married your father. Of an equal, if
" not superior family to his, with a very
" good fortune in possession, and a still
" larger in expectancy, I gave him my
" hand and my heart. I was then in the
" bloom of my youth, and he was as ac-
" complished a nobleman as any in the
" court. Our friends predicted our mu-
" tual happiness, and for a time their pro-
" phecies seemed fulfilled. Our felicity
" was reciprocal, and nothing could ex-
" ceed our pleasure. In less than two
" years, however, I found that there was
" no certainty in human enjoyments. My
" Lord began to estrange himself from
" me, and shew a coldness that at once

" shocked and alarmed my love. I gave
" myself up to chagrin and melancholy:
" my-days were robbed of peace, my nights
" of rest. My friends and family took no-
" tice of the alteration in my face and
" manner: they all enquired into the cause
" of it; but I never informed any of them
" what the true cause was, except Lady
" P—, my mother's sister, whose love
" and friendship I had so great a respect
" for, that I could not help satisfying her
" as to the occasion of my conduct. La-
" dy P—, to an exceeding good under-
" standing added a thorough knowledge
" the world and its customs. My mother
" dying when I was young she took the care
" of me, and I regarded her as a parent, her
" whole conduct to me had ever proved
" her the best of friends.

' Ah, my child,' replied she, when
I had finished my complaint, ' you are
yet very young, and imagine that you
have no disappointments to meet with
" in

' in life: fatal experience will convince
' you of the contrary every day; and the
' hardest lesson you have to learn, is to
' bear them with prudence and fortitude.
' You are not the only woman who has
' reason to complain of an husband's ne-
' glect and coldness, and I also believe
' you have given as little cause for it as
' any one. However you must endeavour
' to support yourself under your troubles
' by the reflection of your own innocence.'

" I could not help expressing my fears
" to my aunt, that some other woman
" had, perhaps, an engagement with him
" before our marriage, and that, tired of
" me, he had returned to her; and be-
" ing put in possession of my fortune,
" it had enabled him to indulge his pas-
" sions. She did every thing in her power
" to quiet those suspicions; and promised,
" as she had a very extensive acquaint-
" ance, to learn where he resorted, and
" what company he kept, as by that means

" she would be able to judge what his
" pursuits were. She exhorted me to make
" myself as easy as I could, and de-
" pend upon her diligence and friend-
" ship to serve me, and to ease my doubts.
" The unbending my heart to her had
" been of great benefit, and her promise
" to discover his attachment, gave me a
" hope that he might be reclaimed, and
" would be the husband my wishes and my
" heart had described him. Though I
" had great reliance on Lady P——'s
" judgment and discretion, yet I could not
" help being uneasy, or avoid assuring my-
" self that it was an attachment to some
" woman, which had deprived me of his
" heart and society. In a few days af-
" terwards my aunt returned."

' Well, Madam,' exclaimed I, ' are
' my suspicions true or false? are they re-
' alised, and am I wretched?'

' I fear my dear,' replied she, ' that
' the

‘the truth is worse than you have represented it to yourself.’

‘Oh inform me of all, let me know the worst that can befall me, and I shall no longer torment myself with apprehensions, or distress myself with uncertainties. Oh tell me every thing.’

‘To ease your apprehensions then, I must acquaint you, that there is nothing of what you fear in his conduct.’

‘Then I am happy let what will be the case.’

‘Ah, my child, it had, perhaps, been better for you that it was so. Time and reflection might have restored him to your arms; but his present passion is such, that, like a fondness for life, it grows upon them who give themselves up to it; and the longer we accustom ourselves to it, the fonder of it we become, and can less easily leave it off than ever.’

‘It is terrible, indeed! but what is it?’

‘ A passion for play. Your Lord is
‘ engaged with a set of men, many of
‘ whom are nobles by their titles, though
‘ their lives and manners disgrace the rank
‘ they hold in life; who have reduced play
‘ to a science, and, by long experience,
‘ have brought chances to certainties; who
‘ make Gaming the business of their lives,
‘ for it ceases to be a diversion to those
‘ whose fortunes and happiness depend
‘ on their good or bad success at cards
‘ or dice; who are beggared by an un-
‘ lucky stroke, and who fail not, in con-
‘ sequence of the importance it is to them
‘ to win, to take every advantage, whe-
‘ ther fair or otherwise, which their supe-
‘ rior skill gives them. It is with such
‘ a set of men he is leagued. He is en-
‘ engaged with them every night; his ea-
‘ gerness in seeking his own ruin, has
‘ estranged him from your arms: and as
‘ his conduct has already destroyed your
‘ peace and happiness, so I fear the con-
‘ tinuance

'tinuance of it will also ruin his peace
'and his estate.'

'No,' replied I, then but an inadequate judge of the consequences; 'when he finds himself imposed on, and learns the characters of his associates, he will forsake their company. He has too much honour and sense to attach himself to men of such abandoned principles; and especially when he loses such sums as must open his eyes to their proceedings, he will utterly abandon them.'

'One would imagine, by your conversation, that you were educated in another age, you appear to be so unacquainted with the manners of this. You are mistaken in every one of your arguments. A desire of regaining what he has lost, will make him hazard every thing to accomplish it. When he has to deal with such people, the consequence is easily foreseen; and as to learning

' their characters, he is already well acquainted with them: but to play deep, ' to risque all a man is worth in the world ' upon the turn of a die, is reckoned a ' mark of honourable distinction in this ' age, and a sign of intrepid bravery and ' untainted honour. However great my ' fears may be, yet I hope they will not ' be fulfilled. Perhaps you may have it ' in your power to reduce him to the ' paths of domestic happiness by your conduct.'

" She then gave me most excellent advice, which I determined to pursue, " and left me. Though I had the greatest opinion of my aunt's penetration and judgment, yet I could not help thinking that her regard for me, might make her interest herself in the matter, and that her prejudices induced her to paint things in a worse light than they really were. That nothing might be wanting on my side, I did every thing in my power

" power to make his home agreeable, and
" to entice him to return to happiness. But
" all in vain did I endeavour. His time,
" his whole attention was taken up with
" his parties at play; and his constitu-
" tion was hurt, and his temper sour'd,
" while his affairs were more and more
" prejudiced every day. I never knew
" any thing of his success but by his
" behaviour to me: and I conjectured
" that when he treated me more kindly
" than usual, he had been fortunate. Five
" years passed on in this manner, and I
" feared that my not being a mother,
" might be one cause of his coolness to
" me, as well as his fondness for play.
" This consideration made me very un-
" easy. About this time an uncle of mine
" died. He was possessed of a very large
" property; was a bachelor, and having
" been exceedingly fond of me in his life-
" time, left me all his fortune when he
" died; but learning, by some means or
" other,

" other, your father's unhappy propensity for gaming, had left it in such a manner as prevented his touching it, without my consent and concurrence; and he imagined I would not agree to his throwing it away. This circumstance helped to heighten my husband's resentment. He concluded, though very unjustly, that I had held frequent conferences with my uncle about him, and that he, being whimsical and peevish, had worded his will in this manner, on purpose to affront him, at least to throw a reflection on him, as if he was not capable of taking care of his own estate. He did not fail to acquaint me with his sentiments on the first opportunity.

'I wish you joy, my Lady,' said he, with a sneer, in a few days after the affair happened, 'of this accession to your fortune. I hope your Ladyship's prudence will take more care of it than I should have been able to do.'

'I af-

‘I assure you my Lord, I can have no fortune which is not yours, nor do I desire to have any thing that you should not partake of.’

‘Humph,’ replied he, ‘I can hardly credit that assertion, after this specimen of you conduct in influencing that old blockhead your uncle to leave his fortune in the manner he did.’

“I was going to exculpate myself; he would not hear me, but, rising hastily, left the room. These suspicions, that he so wrongfully entertained of me, and his manner of expressing them, could not fail to make me uneasy. Accustomed to a domestic life, I should have found my chiefest happiness at home, had such a life suited my husband also. But now it was the place where I indulged my griefs in private, and poured out my unavailing lamentations. The solitary and recluse manner in which I have lived since your father’s death, may

“ may convince you of the truth of these
“ assertions. Another year had nearly
“ escaped after this conversation, before
“ we had any other upon this subject. I
“ had the mortification to learn that he was
“ pressed on all sides for money, that re-
“ peated losses had injured his affairs, and
“ that he was in a very bad situation. This
“ intelligence gave me the greatest con-
“ cern, for I could not put a stop to it.
“ Then it was that my aunt’s predictions re-
“ turned to my remembrance, and I found
“ how foolishly I had argued. My Lord
“ had separated beds for some time, upon
“ the excuse, that he would not disturb me
“ by his irregularities; and as the times
“ he came home at, would be a means
“ of breaking my rest, and injuring my
“ health, which he had the tenderest re-
“ gard for, he would take another room.
“ At that time, I replied, that the greatest
“ compliment he could shew me, which
“ I should take as an instance of his ten-
“ derness,

"dernes, would be to preserve his own
"health. This was unheeded by him,
"and he persevered in his former way of life.
"I was alone at breakfast one morning
"when he entered the room. He had not
"gone to bed till it was very late, and I
"was surprised to see him up at that hour,
"for he was very seldom of my party at
"the breakfast-table: but his appearance
"concerned and surprised me still more:
"his face was pale and haggard; his eyes
"were bloodshed, and sunk in his head;
"his hair was dishevelled, and there was
"such a horrible wildness in his whole
"figure, that I sat silent with affright.
"He threw himself into a chair, and
"spoke not a word, but sighed several
"times very heavily. I first found words,
"and those were to enquire after his
"health. He answered not. I rose and
"went to him.

‘ What

‘ What is the matter?’ said I; ‘ oh, tell me! my Lord, what ails you. I am terrified to death at the appearance you make. Tell me what assistance I can procure for you.’

‘ None,’ said he, after beholding me some time with the most horrid gloomy look: his eyes expressive of his internal feelings. ‘ None, that can do me any good—but—’

‘ What?’ said I, eagerly, as he paused: ‘ tell me, what can relieve you, and it is yours.’

‘ I will take you at your word: tho’ I have no reason to believe you will keep it. An ill run of luck has attended me for some time. Last night fortune did her utmost to ruin me, and nearly effected it. I had raised a considerable sum of money in hopes of retrieving my affairs. I lost it all: nay more, my honour hangs engaged for a large sum which, with that I borrowed,

‘ I am

‘ I am unable to pay, and ruin and disgrace stares me in the face. I am undone.’

‘ What is the amount of the whole?’

‘ More than you will pay for me, or I chuse to ask you — Eleven thousand pounds.’

‘ Let not that disturb you for a moment, while I have the power to make you easy.’

“ I went to get pen and paper from an escrutoire which was in the palour, and of which I kept the key.”

“ You don’t mean to tantalize me, I hope,’ said he: ‘ consider my situation is desperate.’

‘ Far be it from me to aggravate misfortune.’

“ I sat down, and wrote an order to the trustees of my uncle’s will, to prepare themselves to pay me, or my order, in three days time, the sum he required. “ I knew they had more in their hands,

“ and

" and that they could command that sum
" at the shortest notice. When I had fi-
" nished it, I put it into his hands. He
" looked at it some time without being
" able to read or understand it, so great
" was his confusion. At last he made it
" out, and looking at me very stedfastly
" as I stood before him,"

' I believe,' said he, ' I have wronged
' you. But pardon me this time, Lady
' Stanton. My heart is too full to say
' more. My own imprudence makes it
' necessary to avail myself of your genero-
' sity now: send it to your friends,' said he,
' returning me the letter, ' I will see you
' again presently.'

" He retired, and I obeyed his com-
" mands, exceedingly happy in having this
" opportunity of obliging him. It was
" five hours before I saw him again, and
" then his appearance was much altered
" for the better. He had been under the
" hands of his valet, and looked much
" more

"more at ease. I congratulated him on
"the change."

'To you I am indebted for it,' said he,
embracing me with tenderness; 'your
'kindness and generosity in assisting me at
'this time, has given peace and ease to
'my mind. I have been able to take three
'or four hours sleep, a refreshment I have
'not had these three nights'

"He then gave me an account of his
"losses, and blamed himself so severely
"for his misconduct, and condemned his
"own imprudence and folly so much, that
"he left me no room to say any thing on
"the subject had I been ever so well in-
"clined. We dined together *tete à tête*,
"and I reckoned this one of the happiest
"days of my life. It was after dinner
"that he proposed the scheme, of all others,
"that was most agreeable to me, and
"which I wished to have mentioned myself,
"but feared to do it lest he should think
"that I put a constraint upon him, or seem-

"ed desirous to purchase his freedom : it
"was, to retire into the country to this
"house for a few months."

"I have not seen Stanton-hall since I
"have been married," said he ; "and as it
"is now a fine season, I shall be glad to
"spend a few months there if it is agreea-
"ble to you."

"My answer helped to confirm him in
"his intentions of going there, and in
"three days we set off together. Happy
"in getting him from town, and extricat-
"ing him from the scene of trouble and
"anxiety he had so lately been engaged in.
"I hoped the leisure the country would
"afford him, would throw him into a train
"of reflections upon his past conduct, and
"that he would enter into a resolution ne-
"ver to pursue that destructive course a-
"gain."

I must conclude this long epistle for my
paper is expended.

Yours,

GEO. BENSON.

L E T -

LETTER XC.

To the same.

I Continued buried in atention while this excellent woman pursued her story.

" — The time we remained in the country was spent in such a manner as gave me the strongest hopes that my wishes would be fulfilled: and my return to town was much against my will, as I fancied a longer residence in this situation of peace and repose, would confirm a cure I had some reason to believe was made. Another circumstance that added to our mutual happiness, and which I thought would effectually complete his reformation, was, that I found myself likely to be a mother on my return to London. His tenderness and affection for me seemed to be increased, when I communicated this intelligence to him; and he avoided every thing that could give me offence, or make me imagine " he

“ he had returned to his former courses,
“ during the time of my pregnancy. At
“ length I was brought to bed of a son,
“ and you were the pledge of our happi-
“ ness. Nothing could equal the pleasure
“ your father expressed, nor the fondness
“ he testified for you. This gave me the
“ greatest satisfaction; as I concluded his
“ regard for you would prevent him from
“ injuring his property: and I looked upon
“ you as a gift sent from heaven to wean
“ him from the ways of ruin, and turn his
“ steps from the road of destruction. But
“ these were idle notions, and vain conclu-
“ sions. In a few months he returned to
“ the same set who had formerly made a
“ prey of him; and he entered more deeply
“ than ever into the spirit of play, as if his
“ temporary retreat from it had only served
“ to increase his eagerness. Though I
“ feared, from his behaviour, too similar
“ to his former to be easily mistaken, that
“ he had again attached himself to play;
“ yet

" yet I stifled my suspicions ; and the care
" of you divided my attention, and would
" not permit me to dwell so much upon it
" as before. At this time your aunt and
" mine, whom you may just remember to
" have seen, Lady P—— came to vi-
" sit me. Though she had seen me often,
" since the first conversation she had with
" me on the subject of your father's un-
" happy passion ; yet she never hinted any
" thing more to me about it : that sensible
" and judicious friend knew very well that
" time would convince me of my mistake :
" and forbore, for that reason, to say any
" thing to me that might serve to increase
" my unhappiness, or make me feel the
" pain I was to undergo before my time.
" But she called on me now on purpose to
" enter into the merits of the affair with
" me. She did not delay long. Our con-
" versation concerning you first introduced
" the subject.

‘ It had been better,’ said she, ‘ that
you had no son.’

‘ Ah, why, Madam? He is my greatest
happiness; and why should I be deprived
of him?’

‘ I wish you not to lose him,’ replied she;
‘ but in the manner his father acts, he had
better not have been.’

‘ You are alarmed; but I should not be
your friend if I did not inform you of
your situation.’

“ Surprize and grief kept me silent,
“ whilst she continued speaking; nor could
“ I find words when she ceased: she seized
“ the opportunity that offered, and resum-
“ ed the discourse.”

‘ I saw with much pleasure the happy
change in his conduct and disposition,
when you prevailed on him to go down
with you into the country. I did then
form an hope that you would have been
able to have banished this fiend that has
taken possession of him. On his return
‘ to

' to town I imagined his cure confirmed; for
' his abstinence from his darling passion, for
' so long a time as during your pregnancy,
' was such an instance of self-denial, that I
' began to conclude, that to be able to con-
' quer himself so far, he must have abjured
' play for ever. Within these three months
' the veil is withdrawn, and he appears as
' before, if not worse. The birth of this
' son has given him power over his woods,
' and some parts of his estate; and they are
' all in danger. It is no secret what you
' did for him, my dear. Nay, do not
' blush; he has published it himself, with
' an addition of his own, that he does not
' doubt but he shall be able to obtain the
' whole of your uncle's estate from you.
' The world judges differently of your con-
' duct. The weak, the wicked, and the
' worldly, think you acted foolishly in
' parting with such a sum of money, and
' sneer at your want of understanding, be-
' cause they are sure that the rest of the

‘ fortune will follow it. But the more moderate and sensible, and those whose opinions should have the greatest weight with you, consider it as a very laudable and good action: they think it a sufficient proof of your regard and affection for your husband; and add, that as you have now a son, and there is a probability of your having more children, that you cannot, if you have any regard to their future interest, rob them of what will one day be their only resource, to gratify this destructive passion of your husband’s.’

‘ What will you have me do, my dear aunt? can you desire me, or will you have me see the man whom my solemn vows and my own inclinations oblige me to love and succour, distressed for want of that money which it is in my power to give him? Will he not justly accuse me with want of affection?’

‘ He

‘ He may do so, but not with justice :
‘ nor do I see any reason you have to sacri-
‘ fice the happiness and interest of this
‘ child, or any other you may have, to in-
‘ dulge the inordinate extravagance of a
‘ man who is blind to your good, his own,
‘ and that of your family.’

“ With arguments like these, too long
“ to repeat to you now, did she combat
“ my resolutions to assist your father ; and
“ representing to me the inutility of my
“ acting in that manner, as well as the
“ folly of it, brought me at last to her
“ way of thinking. But this was not done
“ at once ; and it required many attacks to
“ subdue the affection I had for him, which
“ might have been carried even to my own and
“ your ruin. Time convinced me of the pru-
“ dence of Lady P——’s advice. She put me
“ into a method of securing for you that part
“ of your father’s property which he was
“ so thoughtlessly squandering away, and
“ giving me an opportunity of being the

H 3 “ agree-

" agreeable messenger of good tidings to
" you at this day. But to pursue my
" story. The same ill fortune which at-
" tended your father before, did not fail
" to persecute him now. He still lost: and
" with much the same dejection, and ap-
" pearance of despair, did he apply to me
" again for assistance. Much as I pitied
" him, and greatly as my heart was affec-
" ted by his sufferings, the remembrance
" of what my aunt had told me, steeled
" me against all his artifices, and I refused
" to comply with his request."

' Ah, Madam said I interrupting her,
' might not the second exertion of your
' goodness have had such an effect up-
' on him, as would have effectually weaned
' him from his unhappy passion? would
' it not have been worth while to have
' made the experiment at least?'

" It had been entirely useless, my child: the
" same gulf that swallowed the former sums,
" would also have received any others I
" might

" might have contributed to render him
" easy. His quick return to the same
" scenes of danger, to the same storms
" that he had just escaped from, and for
" which he had so severely blamed him-
" self in the hours of cool reflection, served
" to shew me clearly that his disorder was
" incurable, and that every attempt to
" draw him away from his favourite at-
" tachment was fruitless. But I suffered
" then for my refusal, and you suffer now.
" He no longer wore even the appear-
" ance of regard or affection. Our usual
" entertainment was mutual reproaches and
" upbraiding : and he treated me in the
" most ungenerous manner, because I re-
" fused to part with every thing I had
" in the world, to gratify his passions.
" The interest which he saw I took in
" every thing that concerned you, inspired
" him with the design of injuring you in
" case you lived, as much as he was able :
" nay, he did not hesitate to avow his
H 4 " designs.

“ designs. All I could do was to endeavour to frustrate them as much as I could, and I communicated my intentions to Lady P—— who promised to assist me. She was acquainted with a person whom he used to apply to in his necessities, to raise him money at any rate: she prevailed upon him to recommend him to a friend of hers, who lent money at an easy rate, who would serve him on the best terms, and give more than any other person. To him therefore this infatuated man went, and disposed, time after time, of every thing that he had a power over; but it was my money which purchased every thing. The mortgages were all taken in trust for me; the estate my uncle had left me, which was managed with great œconomy, and had accumulated in the little time I had it in my hands, supplied me with money to enable me to do thus, though at one tim

" time I was obliged to borrow money to
" answer a large demand that a run of
" ill fortune obliged him to make.
" As this man gave as much money as
" he asked, and at an easier rate than
" any other person, your father always ap-
" plied to him; and, by that means, I had
" an opportunity of preserving great part
" of the paternal estate for you, which
" would otherwise have gone into the pos-
" session of strangers. During this state of
" trouble and anxiety, the reflection that
" I was taking care of your interest alone,
" supported me. Your innocent caresses
" amply repaid my trouble. I required
" some extraordinary consolation to enable
" me to bear the persecutions your father
" made me suffer, and which lasted up-
" wards of seven years. In that time I had
" the mortification to see him lose every
" thing that he had any power to dispose
" of, and ruin at once his fortune and con-
" stitution: the latter loss was most fatal

“ to him, as it brought him to his grave
“ at last. I lamented him as an husband ;
“ but the shock did not surprize me, as I
“ had been prepared for it long before. It
“ released me from my troubles ; and I had
“ nothing left but to apply myself wholly
“ to you. I retired to this house ; and here
“ I have lived these fourteen years in
“ the recluse manner you have seen. I a-
“ bandoned all my friends and the pleasures
“ of the town, and devoted myself entirely
“ to the study of your welfare. I had been
“ witness to the many irregularities young
“ men of your fortune and rank in life are
“ guilty of: I have seen them return from
“ their travels such motley animals, that
“ they could not be found to belong to
“ any nation, though a vile compound of
“ the worst parts of many. I therefore
“ bred you up after my own notions, and
“ have the happiness of seeing that my
“ hopes are not disappointed. In the mean
“ time I was not less industrious in im-

“ proving

" proving your fortune, though unknown
" to you, who had ever been taught to be-
" lieve that I resided in the country chiefly
" through frugality. In that opinion I
" have kept you till this moment, in which
" I find it necessary to undeceive you; espe-
" cially as the happiness of your future life
" is concerned in this discovery. And now,"
said she, opening a cabinet that she had
her arm upon, while she had been talking
with me, and taking out some writings,
" I put you in possession of not only the
" greatest part of your father's estate, which
" you imagined had been alienated from
" you, but also of all my uncle's fortune,
" very little diminished: my jointure will
" serve me for the rest of my life."

Astonishment, pleasure, gratitude, af-
fection, tied up my tongue, and rendered
me incapable of giving vent to the variety
of passions that contended in my heart. I
found words at last.

'No, Madam,' said I, returning her the
papers, 'let me not deprive you of your

H 6 'fortune

‘ fortune at once. Enough have you suffered already, to prevent my encreasing your troubles: let me wait for the time, (which I hope is far distant) when you, receiving the reward of your merits, shall not respect earthly possessions. You have done enough for me already, too much for me ever to return. Oh, tell me, tell me how I shall be able to repay this goodness.’

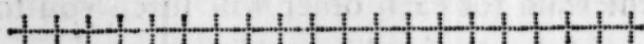
‘ By accepting these,’ said she, giving the papers to me again: ‘ Take them, Edmund; and mayest thou live long and happily to enjoy the wealth and power they convey to you. Your present affection for me, and the continuance of it, is all the recompence I hope for or expect. You have answered all my wishes; you have fulfilled all my hopes; that is returning all that is in your power. You are now in the situation I desired to see you; enamoured with a woman virtuous, good, who feels a mutual affection for you. By making her the partner of your heart

‘ heart and bed, you ensure a life of happiness and peace for yourself. You shun ‘ those rocks on which so many unhappy ‘ young men have been cast away ; and the ‘ reciprocal regard and affection which you ‘ entertain for each other will teach you to ‘ avoid doing any thing which hurting one, ‘ must pain both equally. Perhaps the ‘ world, or you yourself, may blame me ‘ for not giving you what is called a proper ‘ education, and sending you round Europe. ‘ I am an Englishwoman, and love my ‘ country. I think that we possess as much ‘ sterling sense and good understanding as ‘ our neighbours on the continent, and ‘ more honesty. Youth is the worst season ‘ for making observations on the manners ‘ and policy of different people : that should ‘ be the work of a riper age, and more enlarged mind. I therefore despise those ill- ‘ liberal censures ; and you yourself will excuse me, when I tell you that my design ‘ was to make you good and virtuous ; which ‘ will

' will afford you greater satisfaction here-
' after than being possessed of a vain
' knowledge of the world.'

Adieu,

G. BENSON.



LETTER XCI.

To the same.

THUS did that worthy woman fi-
nish her discourse. It would be
fruitless to attempt to relate to you the
expressions of gratitude that my overladen
heart poured forth. She put a stop to
them by asking me, "What I intended to
do?"

I replied, "To go to London directly,
and open my real circumstances to Miss
Conyers: entreat her pardon for having
so long imposed upon her, and with her
approbation apply to her guardians to
unite us. But if it was possible, that
my

" my dearest mother could accompany me,
" and that I should be so happy as to re-
" ceive her approbation of my choice, it
" would encrease my felicity."

" I am convinced, my dear child," re-
plied she, " from what you have already
" told me, that my approbation must fol-
" low your choice; but if it will give you
" any satisfaction, I will, with a great deal
" of pleasure accompany you when you
" will. Perhaps," added she, " my con-
" nexions may serve to forward your suit
" with this lady's guardians if they are
" fond of quality."

" The journey is long, Madam, and per-
" haps may fatigue you, as you know my
" impatience will not permit me to travel
" slowly."

She interrupted me with a smile.

" Though I am an old woman, Ed-
" mond, I have not many of the infirmi-
" ties of age attending me. I can bear a
" fatigue of this kind very well: and as
" for

"for preparations for this journey, a little
"will serve me. The Dutches of M—,
"my niece, has often entreated me to
"spend a winter with her; I know she is
"in town, and I will surprise her,"

"And when will you be ready to go?"

"After dinner. It will be necessary to
"leave some orders behind me, and when
"that is done I shall be at your service."

How kind, how condescending is this good mother! As soon as ever dinner was over, the carriage was prepared and away we went. On our journey we settled the plan of our operations. I was to leave her at the Dutches of M—'s, and was still to retain my former character till I had an opportunity of explaining the whole affair in private to Miss Conyers, and offering my reasons for having assumed the appearance and name that did not belong to me. I doubted not but I should have been again admitted into her presence. I never could have imagined that she, whom I thought

I thought attached to me by the ties, the strong ties of mutual affection, could have refused to see me: yet it is so. Yes, my friend, it is so; and I have the misfortune of experiencing the caprice and instability of a woman's love. I found O Reilly where I had left him: his honest heart was rejoiced to see me. The morning after I arrived, I sent a card, begging permission to wait on Miss Clinton. My servant received for answer, that she was not at home. The card was left, he called again in the evening: I received no answer. My prophetic heart foretold some unhappy change in my affairs. I was determined to leave nothing in doubt, and resolved to visit her myself. For that purpose, and to obviate every excuse which she might form, I acquainted her by a card, which I sent the preceding evening, that I would wait on her at an hour which I appointed the next day. You may be sure that I was punctual. I was shewn

shewn into a parlour, where I waited some time before Miss Clinton came to me. Her countenance shewed that all was not well. Her address confirmed it : it was cool, distant, and polite : it had been cordial and friendly before : the difference struck me.

" I have presumed, Miss Clinton, to
" wait on you, to know how Miss Con-
" yers does. My adverse fate prevents
" my being able to enquire of herself, and
" forces me to be troublesome to you. I
" must depend upon you go od-nature to
" forgive me; and if ever you should feel
" the same passion which governs me, you
" will think of and pardon me."

" Mr. Benson has not offended me, he
" has no occasion to demand my pardon."

The manner in which she particularised herself struck me.

" Who else have I offended then to make
" forgiveness necessary? When have you
" seen Miss Conyers?"

" I saw

"I saw her lately, she was but indifferent, and low spirited."

"Her illness prevented her blessing me with her sight."

"It was not, indeed, Mr. Benson."

"Was there any other cause?"

"You must know better than me, Sir."

"I know of none, unless loving her with a fondness that almost became idolatry be one. That is the only cause of offence I ever gave her."

"Then she has been deceived."

"Not by me; and surely she does not use me well, or justly, to give credit to any tales to my prejudice, without allowing me an opportunity of defending myself. But has she said nothing of me in my absence? did she not bid you give me some message when I should call upon you at my return? Your curiosity and anxiety will lead you to a discovery of the worst at once, and what

"I wish'd

"I wish'd out of tenderness to you to
"conceal."

"Ah!" said I eagerly, "reveal it to me
"at once, let nothing remain a secret that
"she is concerned in."

"She has desired me to tell Mr. Ben-
"son that she would never see him more."

This was the stroke of a giant. It tied my tongue, and froze my senses. I remained in a lifeless state of stupidity, insensible to every thing about me, even to the attention of Miss Clinton, who, seeing my situation, used all her endeavours to recover me herself, without calling in any witness to behold my distress. She effected it at last, and the first words I uttered were:

"She will never see him more!—Never
"see him more! For what fate am I
"reserved," for I thought I could never
have supported the melancholly idea of
being banished from her sight; and how
can I endure the reality? "The happy-
"ness

“ ness of my life is vanished like a dream,
“ and I am left to mourn the absence of
“ the delightful vision. Forgive me, Miss
“ Clinton, forgive the ravings of a man
“ distracted.”

“ I forgive, and pity you.”

“ You would, if you knew how truly
“ I loved her, how sincerely my soul is
“ devoted to her. But did she assign no
“ cause for this harsh, this cruel sentence?”

“ Seek not to know more than I am
“ permitted to tell you: I should be guilty
“ of a breach of trust if I revealed any
“ of my friend’s secrets; and that I am
“ sure you will not desire of me.”

“ Far from it: but cannot you be so
“ far my friend, as to obtain permission
“ for me only to see her once; and if
“ she shall then remain fixed to her re-
“ solution, I will never desire to have ano-
“ ther interview with her. Or if you can-
“ not obtain that favour, at least let me
“ have the justice done me of knowing my
“ offence.

“ offence. That is all I ask; for I know
“ the innocence of mine own heart, and can
“ venture to bring all my actions to the
“ test; and if there is one of them, which
“ belies the affection I have professed for
“ her, let me be utterly deprived of her
“ favour for ever.”

“ That is not unreasonable, and I will
“ try to obtain that favour for you. I
“ will do more, I will attempt to pre-
“ vail on her to see you.”

“ I shall be ever grateful for your kind-
“ nesses. Be assured, Miss Clinton, I am
“ wronged, and in being my friend, you
“ are only doing me justice. I know I
“ have many enemies, whom she is well
“ acquainted with; and why would she
“ be so credulous as to give credit to them,
“ to my prejudice, without hearing any
“ thing I had to say in my own justifi-
“ cation?”

“ Well, Mr. Benson, I will be as good
“ as my word to you.”

" And when shall I call to know the
success of your negociation ? "

" I shall be at home to-morrow morn-
ing."

I could not part from her without repeating the protestations of my innocence, and assuring her how miserable I should be till I knew how she succeeded. I returned to O Reilly, who saw plainly that something had happened which was not pleasing to me. His delicacy prevented his asking me immediately what had affected me; but I could judge by his uneasiness, and the concern that he expressed, that he wished to know the cause of my chagrin. I could not refuse a gratification of that kind to so good and faithful a friend. He heard me with grief, but not with surprize.

" I always feared so much," replied he when I had done: " there is no dependence upon the smiles of women. I remember to have heard of an Italian

" pro-

" proverb when I was abroad which says,
" *That a man of shew is worth a woman of*
" *gold.* And every day I live convinces
" me more and more of the truth of it.
" And there is another which has also a
" very good meaning, and is as true as the
" other, *Deeds are men, but words are wo-*
" *men.* I never shall give any credit to
" them again."

However O Reilly might abuse them, it did not at all contribute to my peace. I passed the night in a state of anxiety and trouble that was truly pitiable. Conscious that I had done nothing to merit her anger, I could not account for it, and my suspense and uncertainty only aggravated my misery. With what impatience did I wait till the approach of the hour in which I was to visit Miss Clinton, and learn from her my fate. It came at last, and I hastened to visit her.

" Alas," said she, when she saw me, accosting me with a countenance that plainly shewed

shewed she pitied me, and had an interest in my misfortunes, "All I can do for you" is in vain. All my endeavours are fruitless, either to prevail on her to see you once more, or even to give me leave to inform you of the cause of her resolution against you."

"O Matilda," exclaimed I in the agony of passion, "did I ever imagine that you would have given me reason to call you unjust or cruel! Yet it is so, and I am the most unfortunate of mankind. You know her goodness, Miss Clinton, and why will you suffer it to be abused? You are sensible of my innocence, and why will you let it be misrepresented to her? I was forced to quit her, but for a short time, upon an affair that we were both interested in, if she had any concern for me. This was the moment in which we should have come to an explanation, from which she would have seen my conduct deserved her applause, rather than

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“ her censure. But she is deaf to my en-
“ treaties, and has entirely forsaken me.
“ Can falsehood and infidelity be the inha-
“ bitants of so generous a breast as Ma-
“ tilda’s? Or can I be deceived in the opi-
“ nion I have formed of her goodness and
“ virtue? Tell me if she spurns me from
“ her having chosen another to supply my
“ place, or does she seem to have a sense
“ of her injustice?”

“ You wrong her indeed. It was with
“ tears that she desired me to repeat to you
“ her resolutions. She has been deceived
“ I fear, Mr. Benson, in regard to you;
“ and the billet you wrote to her on your
“ departure from town, has served to con-
“ firm suspicions that subsequent accidents
“ have made facts.”

“ Then my enemies have succeeded,
“ and her credulous heart, that could have
“ no reliance on my faith or honour, is en-
“ tirely estranged from me. Perfidious
“ woman! Could she not have waited for

" proofs before she had condemned me?
" But she has been imposed upon, and eve-
" ry thing that could be alledged to my
" disadvantage has been made use of to
" turn her against me. What a treasure
" of sweetness and perfection have I lost!"

" There have been many artifices made
" use of I believe to prejudice her against
" you; and I fear as you do, that they have
" succeeded. But while she believes you,
" what you imagine her to be, unfaithful,
" she, like you, laments the loss of an heart
" that was once dear to her, and I am con-
" vinced would be still so if she knew what
" you had to say to her in your own justi-
" fication."

" And why will she not hear it? Why
" will she not attend to an explanation that
" must satisfy her, and on which our mu-
" tual happiness depends."

" I know not why she will not; but
" whilst you are wasting time in lamenting

“ this change in her conduct you may lose
“ her for ever.”

“ How, I beseech you ?”

“ The manner how we neither of us
“ know ; but I may venture to inform you
“ without her permission, that Lady Grigs-
“ by has some scheme on foot which she
“ determines to put in practice, and that
“ Matilda is in very great apprehensions
“ for the consequences. Her aunt tells
“ her that Mr. D'Aubigny is to be in
“ town on Wednesday next, and that day
“ will decide Matilda's fate, and put an
“ end to her troubles and anxiety upon
“ her account. What is to be the result
“ of this extraordinary meeting we know
“ not, but we tremble for the event.”

“ And what am I to do ? sit by quietly
“ and see my dearest hopes snatched from
“ me ? See all the store of happiness I
“ had laid up for my future life dissipated
“ in a moment ? The reflection is mad-
“ ness !”

“ I know

"I know not how to advise you, Mr. Benson."

"I must take advice from the urgency of my affairs, and the distress of my situation. But what will avail any thing I can do? She no longer regards me. However I will convince her I merited her esteem, and justify my own conduct at all events."

I thanked this worthy girl for her friendship and the pains she had taken to serve me, assuring her that I should ever esteem myself under the greatest obligations to her whatever befell me. I left her distracted with a thousand disagreeable thoughts. The part I am resolved to act is determined upon. This affair shall be sifted to the bottom. I must and will know by whom I have been calumniated, and for what reason Matilda has thrown me off. But while I am communicating to you these affairs on which every thing that is dear to me depends; while my situation, critical and

alarming, demands your advice and assistance, you maintain an obstinate silence, and refuse to answer one of my letters. Oh, my friend, can you reconcile this conduct to the professions you have made me, and to the former tenor of your behaviour to me. Tell me, what shall I do? Let your sage counsels direct me: let your experience point the road to happiness and Matilda. Ah, they are joined together, and one cannot exist to me without the other.

Adieu,

GEO. BENSON.



LETTER XCII.

To JAMES HILGROVE, Esq.

YOU are reposed in the bosom of peaceful security, whilst I, dear James, am a prey to doubts, hopes, fears, to resentments, that have no particular object; and to the crowd of evils which must oppress

press one who is too much in love to have the free possession of his reason, and knows not what to do, or how to act. I am abandoned by my friends : for Asgill, on whom I thought I could rely, will not write to me. I am forsaken by her, whose smiles and good opinion could alone make life valuable to me. I am apprehensive that a more artful and fortunate rival has taken some indirect means to supplant me in her good opinion ; and that he has succeeded, I too fatally experience. The recluse life I led till within these two years, is the occasion of my feeling more severely the evils of my present situation. I want the taste, the relish for those amusements which would dissipate my chagrin, or divert my torments. No external application can heal internal wounds ; and in vain is the surgeon's skill exerted to skin over the sore that festers within. My thoughts and notions are confined to a narrower channel : my happiness is circumscribed in a smaller circle than if

I had been educated more at large in the world: for then I should have been acquainted with more methods of endeavouring to alleviate my troubles than at present; and having received consolation from them on any former occasion, I should naturally now have recourse to them to yield me a similar relief. Alas! I know none of those; and consequently my woes must affect me the more strongly, as I am unacquainted with any mode of diverting their course. They come on me like a flood, a mountain-flood, Hilgrove, that rushes from the hills, and in its fury sweeps the riches of the vales and the peaceful inhabitants away together. The misfortune is rendered more grievous by their fancied security. The objection which arose from the inequality of my fortune being happily removed, the disappointment at finding Matilda averse to my wishes was the more intolerable, as I had flattered myself with the hope of possessing her, indulging those transports which my most

most extravagant imagination could never form an adequate idea of. Nay, I had almost reduced that hope to a certainty. I came to throw myself at her feet, to claim the performance of those implied promises which her words had given me. "She would "see me no more." Those were her words, Hilgrove. The kind, the gentle Matilda has rejected me, after suffering me to harbour the most flattering hopes that she would one day be mine. It may arise, perhaps, from national phlegm, or, perhaps, from my peculiar turn of mind : but at this moment, deprived of the only object that is worth my attention, that object which I have beheld, and so long reflected on with such exquisite pleasure, the rest of the world is a blank to me ; and such an absolute possession had this idea taken of my mind, that it almost absorbed all other duties, all other senses in it. The calmness which may appear to you in this favours so little of those transports, either of rage or grief,

I 5 which.

which a man, who truly loves, must naturally fall into in a similar case, that you will be apt to conclude that not giving a demonstration of my passion consonant to your ideas, that passion does not really exist. I do not rave—I do not execrate—I do not abuse the lovely girl, the cause of my woes, nor imprecate heaven's vengeance upon her or myself. I hardly complain. It is true, I weep when I reflect on what I have lost, and that reflection induces the comparison between my present state, and that I should have enjoyed had she still been kind. It is not a calmness arising from apathy—it is rather the horrid serenity of despair. It is the stillness that hushes the sea, and allays the waves, before the tempest bursts out with fury, and buries the devoted bark in the merciless surge. I am prepared for the storm. It will not come on me unexpectedly. I will bare my bosom to the stroke, though it destroys me. The day which

which shall succeed to-morrow is to decide my fate. But why, I know not. Yet so it is. Is not my fate decided already? Matilda will not see me or hear from me. That alas is a melancholly, a fatal decision. But I will not be induced to believe that it is from a levity of conduct, or the natural infidelity of her heart, that she is induced thus to deal by me. I lament her credulity, I bewail the easiness of her disposition that suffers her to be led away. I may complain, but I cannot blame her. In the disguise which I have preserved, the knowledge she had of me was so small, that it extended no farther than a mere acquaintance with my person. She credited my assertions that I was a gentleman, but she knew nothing of my family or connexions. She hardly could divest herself of those doubts and suspicions which had been so industriously propagated to my disadvantage, and so artfully instilled into her mind, even when

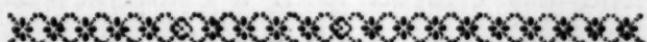
she confessed that she honoured me with her esteem. Can I pretend to blame her, then, if, yielding to the return of the tide of those prejudices and prepossessions, and in my absence too, that she has not the same faith in me as when present? I might then have been able to explain myself to her in such a manner as perhaps had been able to satisfy her doubts, and prevent her confiding too much in these reports, calculated to destroy me in her good opinion. You will tell me, very justly, that all the uneasiness I have suffered, or which may hereafter be entailed upon me, will arise solely from my own fantastic obstinacy; that by a proper and honest account of myself, I had prevented many mortifications, both to her and myself. It is true: and though perhaps at this moment I may tacitly condemn the vanity of the scheme, I must own that though I have encountered various troubles in the prosecution of it, yet I should have

have also lost the enjoyment of those rapturous moments which have stamped the seal of bliss upon my past life; and which, if I shall be so miserable to forego for ever, the repetition of those, which shall flow from the same source, will be still dear to my remembrance, and the consolation of my woes. The formality, the ceremony that attends on rank, might have ensured me the more civil reception at Sir Marmaduke's, perhaps might have rendered an union with his fair ward, a matter of necessary consequence: after having paid the due and requisite attendance, her person had been assigned to me, as a consideration for vesting her lands in trustees for her settlement. We should have gone together like many other fashionable couples, and cared for each other as little as they do. This would have been the end of a courtship commenced in that way. The unimpassioned heart is not an object of desire to me. Without the true knowledge
of

of her sentiments, which I have obtained, by what I may call this innocent artifice, I should have suspected every embrace to have arisen from another cause than that I wished. If therefore I had succeeded, my life would have been much happier than if I had not made this attempt, and it was a satisfaction for which it was worth risking every consideration. But my success now seems so very doubtful, that I may have reason to repent a disguise, by which I have forfeited every thing that is dear to me. There remains, however, one grand effort for me to make yet. Be that favourable, and I shall again be happy. Let Matilda but forsake her prejudices, and abandon her prepossessions, and give me a fair and candid hearing; and if she still continues to maintain her present mode of thinking, though I may be wretched, yet I must acknowledge that she acted justly by me. This then is the foundation of my present hopes, added to
the

the knowledge I have of her love of truth, her mildness and goodness, exclusive of any regard which I might imagine she had entertained for me. I assure you, Hilgrove, which ever way I turn my views in this affair, the prospect is so melancholly, that I am quite disheartened. Asgill, Asgill, when I had informed you of my unhappy situation, I thought you would not have forsaken me! Adieu, my good friend. I hope my complaint will not interrupt your happiness. Adieu, once more, and believe me

Your's affectionately,
GEORGE BENSON.



LETTER XCIII.

To Miss ATKINS.

NOT to acquaint you, Caroline, with every circumstance that I am concerned in, would be offering such an insult

sult to your friendship and regard to me, that I cannot ever form such a notion, without being sensible of the injustice of it: yet, to comply with my own inclinations, and to afford you that satisfaction which you so truly merit from me, will be such a task that, though I may undertake it, I fear I shall never be able to complete it. So great has the revolution been in my affairs, so suddenly has so important a change been effected, that nothing but a repetition of facts and occurrences consequent on that change could ever have persuaded me to believe it real. It is determined, my dear Caroline, it is real: your friend has escaped from a conspiracy against her peace and happiness, that, had it succeeded, would have effectually destroyed both. But why such a scheme should be set on foot, or for what cause carried on to the extremity it was, is equally a mystery to me: I cannot account for it either, why persons of such rank in life should

should interest themselves so extraordinarily in it. But these reflections will come more properly when you have read the account I shall be able to give you of this transaction, however imperfect it may be.

You may well recollect, dear Caroline, how wretched the history Lady Wilmington had given me of Mr. Benson made me. His own conduct, so exceedingly mysterious, encreased my uneasiness; and, actuated by a spirit proper to be exerted upon such an occasion, had all the representation to his prejudice been really true, I resolved to discard him from my thoughts. This was a much harder matter to accomplish than I thought it was; and the struggles between my honour, my regard to myself, and the tenderness I had unfortunately conceived for him, were plainly to be seen in the many letters I wrote to you on the subject. My aunt, who must have been acquainted with the cause of my distress, altered her conduct to me, and treated me with

with that kindness and affection which she knew was capable of melting my resolution, and moulding me to her purpose. Such is the unhappy easiness of my disposition, which though force and cruelty, or an opinion of ill treatment may rouse it into opposition, yet kindness, even from those who have injured me, suspends my resentment. I am in too great an hurry to make a proper return, and to avoid the imputation of ingratitude to judge whether such behaviour is real or pretended. This was an attempt to reconcile herself to me, that Lady Grigsby failed not to make, and with the greatest appearance of success. Lord Averston absented himself, and was satisfied with sending continual enquiries after our healths. It was with concern and hesitation, lest she should offend me, that she introduced any conversation about him. Her uneasiness and delicacy appeared so great upon that head, that I could not avoid relieving her, by asking,

asking, What was the reason we had not seen his Lordship for so long a time? Her answer was, That the fear of rendering himself disagreeable to me had kept him away; that his respect and affection for me were so great, that though he must necessarily suffer at being excluded from my presence, yet he debarred himself that happiness rather than make me uneasy. She said a great deal more in his favour which I attended to very little, and to which I made no reply. However, my asking after him was deemed a sufficient encouragement, and he appeared at our house the next day. Had I thought his sudden visit would have been the consequence, I should have held my tongue; but this trifling circumstance convinced me, that every thing that passed here is communicated to him: his behaviour served as a farther proof. He had been acquainted with the dejection of spirits I had laboured under, and he determined to appear

pear in such a point of view as should correspond with my melancholy sentiments. His penetration was perfectly acquainted with the effects of sympathy. To have been gay or cheerful would have been an insult on my situation. He chose to appear languid, tender, compassionate; himself inspired with the softest passion, and also capable of inspiring others. Had I not been thoroughly persuaded, that art alone caused that change in his behaviour, I might have had some commiseration. How powerful a thing is prejudice! A situation that was so similar to mine must have attracted my notice, and demanded my pity, had I thought it real, and the consequence of a passion for me that was natural and disinterested. I had reason to apprehend the contrary: and every example of his artifice to persuade me to believe him in opposition to my own senses, but served to inspire me with greater aversion to him: the consequence was, that I maintained

tained my coldness and reserve in a greater degree, if possible, than before. This visit opened the way for my aunt to expatiate upon his Lordship's good qualities, his affection, and I know not what beside. A silence, equally mortifying to her vanity, which taught her to imagine she could make me think as she did, and to her fondness for sway, which will not bear controul or contradiction, put her beyond herself, and she broke through the bounds of moderation and temperance, by assuring me, that though I had no regard to my honour or reputation, she had, and would convince me of it, by taking steps for my preservation which I would not pursue myself: that she could not see my scandalous treatment of Lord Averston without the greatest concern; that my conduct was vain, coquettish, and base; and had not his Lordship been infatuated, he would have abandoned me to my own folly: that she could not be consistent with her regard to herself or our

family, suffer me to go on in this manner ; and for the purpose of putting a stop to it had applied to Mr. D'Aubigny, who would be in town in a few days. She doubted not but his authority would settle all matters as well for my happiness as her peace ; for she could not enjoy any satisfaction, while she saw me pursuing such ways as must inevitably lead to my dis-honour. To this reproach, so little merited on my part and so unjustly confered on me by her, I could answer only by my tears. My spirits sunk to a degree of dejection, from which I thought nothing could raise them ; my heart, oppressed with a variety of conflicting passions, had lost the power of exerting itself. These upbraidings quite overcame me. I had not resolution to answer these unjust accusations, the burden was too heavy for me to bear ; and lamentations took the place of more spirited conduct, and I retired in silence to my chamber, bewailing my miserable situation.

situation. I plainly perceived, by my aunt's mentioning Mr. D'Aubigny, that she had applied to him as her *dernier resort*; and doubted not but she would make good any representations of matters she might please to offer him. Great a friend as he had been to me, and as I hoped he was still, yet I could not tell how his conduct towards me would change, as he would receive, or be affected by such tales as my aunt might invent, as well to screen her own behaviour, as to throw an odium upon mine. Would he give any credit to my asseverations in opposition to her's? Would he not believe me actuated by a passion I had reason to be ashamed of, or affected by a weakness that I could not controul? Every justification I could pretend to make would be warped, by the intemperate warmth of prejudice, from its real meaning; and I should be condemned from the very principles on which I had undertaken my defence. The regard, the love I had for

Mr.

Mr. D'Aubigny, made me dread to see him in the light I must necessarily appear to him, as the criminal, the wanton, indulging a shameful intrigue with a man I knew not, and of whom I could give no account when an explanation of my conduct should be demanded of me. Even should this matter turn out well, I could not quit myself of imprudence and indiscretion in paying any attention to a man whom, at all events, I was uncertain about, and in entertaining a favourable opinion of whom I run a manifest risque of being deceived. These considerations, with many others equally distressing, occupied my imagination the whole night, which, in the absence of rest, was devoted to a review of my past conduct; and believe me, Caroline, I did not fail to accuse myself of faults that perhaps my enemies would not have laid to my charge: my heart was oppressed with the sense of my own misconduct. In this state of contrition and self-

self-humiliation, I received a message from Lady Wilmington, that she intended me the honour of a visit. I guessed partly what her business was : and though I wanted no further proofs, or no greater confirmation than that I had received, yet I acted quite passively in the affair, and permitted her to come at the hour she had appointed. She could not help expressing her surprise at the alteration that appeared in me since her former visit ; hoped I was well ; and added, that had she imagined the discovery she made would have affected me in that manner, she would have concealed it entirely ; she entreated my pardon for having interested herself in my affairs, and concluded with saying,

“ I assure you, Miss Conyers, nothing
“ but my regard to truth, and the fear of
“ your being imposed upon by the repre-
“ sentations of so artful a man as Mr.
“ Benson, could have taken me so great
“ lengths. My character is now staked

“ to support what I have already said;
“ and, at all events, I am resolved to con-
“ vincé you of the truth of this matter.
“ The young Lady, whom you already
“ heard me mention as Mrs. Adderley’s
“ friend, will be in town this night, and
“ in a few days you shall have an ac-
“ count, from her own mouth, of the un-
“ happy end of my unfortunate friend,
“ and learn the sense she had of Mr. Ben-
“ son’s perfidy.”

“ I believe you, Madam: it is totally
“ unnecessary to enter into any further ex-
“ planation of the affair. I am satisfied.”

“ Nevertheless,” returns she, “ it is
“ proper that I should vindicate myself.
“ If hereafter Mr. Benson should be re-
“ instated in your favour, you may per-
“haps imagine this information proceeded
“ from prejudice, from a desire of reveng-
“ ing myself on a man who paid his ad-
“ dresses to me once, and then forsook
“ me. It is a piece of justice I owe to
“ myself,

" myself, and I hope you will not prevent
" my freeing myself from every imputa-
" tion of malice, and convincing you that
" I am actuated by the best motives."

" But you will please to consider, La-
" dy Wilmington, that while you are vin-
" dicating your own character by means
" of your friend, you are exposing mine
" to her."

" Make yourself perfectly easy," replied she; " it shall be done in such a man-
" ner as shall rid you of any apprehen-
" sions upon that account: you may be
" sure, that for the regard I pay to the
" memory of my unhappy relation, I
" should be desirous of keeping this af-
" fair as secret as possible."

I saw she was determined to carry her point, and acquiesced in every thing she proposed.

" Whatever measures you may please to
" take, I shall very readily attend to."

She replied, that they were as well con-

ducive to my safety as her honour. She made but a short visit; and I was not sorry at her departure, which left me at liberty to indulge my own meditations, tho' they were of a disagreeable nature. I was not suffered to enjoy the contemplation of my own situation longer. Fresh causes of distress offered themselves, and I was left a prey to aggregated troubles. My good friend, Fanny Clinton, whom you have often heard me mention before, came hastily into my apartments. Her looks, and the eagerness in which she addressed me, shewed something more than ordinary occasioned this visit.

" Well, Fanny, what news have you now?"

" What you don't expect to hear—Mr. Benson has just left me."

" That is rather an unexpected incident; but did he imagine I would give him another opportunity of triumphing over my weakness and folly? Did he come

" come prepared to add to the wrongs he
" has already made me suffer?"

" He did no such thing, Matilda; he
" came to throw himself at your feet, to
" implore your pardon for leaving you so
" abruptly, and to explain the cause of
" it. He came, if he is to be believed—"

" Ah, my sweet Fanny, he is not to
" be believed; there is no credit to be
" given to his assertions. 'Tis dangerous,
" extremely dangerous even to listen to
" him. His words are persuasive, and his
" demeanour wears the garb of truth and
" sincerity, but there is no reliance to be
" placed on him."

" Perhaps, Matilda, you may be de-
" ceived. He seems sincere, he speaks
" with candour and honesty: but be your-
" self the judge. Hear what he has to
" say, and then act as you shall think
" proper."

" And do you, my sweet friend, advise
" me to a step that will be so prejudicial

“ to me? How humble, how degraded
“ must I appear before a man, who gain-
“ ing my good opinion, inspiring me with
“ sentiments of tenderness for him, who
“ heard me avow my regard, could leave
“ me with a—‘Perhaps you will never see
“ me again.’ ‘Remember that letter, Fanny,
“ remember the solemn resolutions I have
“ made, and then tell me, can you hesitate
“ a moment to pronounce that I cannot,
“ compatibly with honour, see him again.’”

“ Ah, Matilda, do not sacrifice the hap-
“ piness of your life to idle and vain dis-
“ tinctions. He has offended you, he comes
“ to implore forgiveness; there has been a
“ mystery in his conduct and character, he
“ comes to explain it. Can you, in reason,
“ demand more? You are prejudiced
“ by the reports you have heard against
“ him.”

“ Stop, Fanny. You know I only ar-
“ gue from his own words, from his own
“ letter,

"letter, from his own behaviour—he stands
"self-convicted."

" Yet you once pretended to love this
" man, Matilda, whom you can banish
" from your presence for ever with such
" unconcern."

" You mistake the state of my heart, if
" you imagine that I am not concerned:
" the tears I have already shed, and those
" which fall from my over-charged eyes at
" this moment, are witnesses that he was
" dear to me. I cannot forget, I never
" shall forget the moments of happiness,
" for they were but moments, that I enjoyed
" in his company. It would be well for
" me if I could. But I must sacrifice to ho-
" nour what love has left me. While I am
" endeavouring to banish him from my re-
" membrance, while I am striving to extin-
" guish the flame that had almost consumed
" me, would you have me run the risque
" of having it blown up again by his insi-
" dious breath, and the ruin of your poor

“ friend would be the consequence. Alas,
“ Fanny, the passion is too strong now,
“ without any help or assistance, to bear the
“ controul of reason. I am already misfe-
“ rable, and into what gulph would you
“ wish to see me plunged? The snares that
“ have been laid for me by Mr. Benson, I
“ have happily escaped: but my aunt, I
“ fear, has other designs, other schemes,
“ which I may not be able to extricate my-
“ self so easily from. It has been hinted,
“ that Mr. D'Aubigny is to be here on
“ Wednesday; and that there is to be some
“ extraordinary disposition of me and my
“ affairs to take place on that day. I know
“ not what they mean or intend; but I
“ know he is too much my friend to suffer
“ any thing to be done that is prejudicial
“ to my interest, or will make me un-
“ happy.”

“ And what answer shall I return to the
“ unhappy Benson?”

“ Repeat

"Repeat the words I have already told
"you to acquaint him with, in case you
"should see him before me. If he shall
"desire to know if you have seen me,
"in consequence of his visits to you; it
"will be necessary to inform him of the
"truth, and of my former resolution cor-
"roborated by this declaration."

"Ah, Matilda, revoke some part of
"this cruel, this unnatural sentence: I
"shall kill him by the delivery of it."

"Had his conduct to me, Fanny, pre-
"served the same appearance of honour
"and integrity which at first charmed me,
"the world should not have forced me to
"say thus to him. But while my heart
"bleeds with my own sorrows, while my
"tongue with difficulty pronounces words
"that are painful to me, it is necessary for
"me to wean myself from any tender sen-
"timents of a man, to whom I have, un-
"happily for myself, listened with too
"much attention. He should be satisfied,

“ he has answered every purpose he could
“ propose from pursuing me : he has made
“ me truly miserable, without having it in
“ his power to restore me to myself again.
“ He has destroyed the peace of my future
“ life without reaping any advantage or be-
“ nefit from it, except that of having it to
“ say, that he successfully triumphed in the
“ affections of a girl whose easy nature suf-
“ fered itself to be imposed on by his arti-
“ fices. But I conjure you, my dear Fan-
“ ny, as you regard me, do not, upon any
“ account whatsoever, hint to him the situ-
“ ation of my heart. He already knows
“ but too well the power he has over it ;
“ and did he imagine it retained any tender
“ sentiments for him, it would induce him
“ to act in such a manner as might be of
“ the greatest detriment to me, and ex-
“ pose me still more to the censures of my
“ friends.”

She promised to comply with my re-
quest, though she did not cease to impor-
tune

tune me on Mr. Benson's behalf, either to see him, or suffer him to write to me. It was all in vain ; and she left me, to give him an account of her bad success : for she could make no alteration in his favour. And here, Caroline, I must pause a little. My paper is nearly finished, and my spirits almost exhausted. The recollection of this part of my chequered fortune which I have already related, and the preparation to communicate the remainder to you, will not permit me to continue this any longer. I must therefore bid you adieu, my sweet friend ; but you shall not remain in suspense for any time. You shall soon know the fate of thine, most sincerely,

MATILDA CONYERS.



L E T T E R XCIV.

To the same.

THIS assures you that I am as good as my promise : for I know you are

K 6 * so

so truly interested in my welfare, that to be uncertain concerning me, is to be unhappy. There is but one state superior to that of friendship : it is that of mutual love. And perhaps it is only because there are more pains, more uneasinesses attending it, than the other, that can endear it more to us. That reciprocal communication of sentiment, that desire of serving each other, that unbounded confidence that has ever reigned between us, has hitherto constituted the happiness of our lives. Whatever change may happen in my circumstances sooner than yours, it shall not prevent me from retaining the same sentiments, the same good opinion, I have ever had of you, and of indulging myself in the enjoyment of our long-continued intimacy.

I broke off in my former letter where Miss Clinton left me to communicate the event of her embassy from me to Mr. Benson. To you I cannot disguise matters, and never have yet hidden any thing from your know-

knowledge. I have the greatest opinion also of Miss Clinton : but at that moment she was not to be trusted with the true situation of my heart. A mistaken and ill-placed compassion has been frequently fatal to our sex. Miss Clinton was at that very instant supplicating me in behalf of Mr. Benson. Had any expressions which she might have deemed favourable to his passion escaped my lips, I feared she might have communicated them to him, and given him such hopes, founded on my weakness and unhappy partiality for him, as might have induced him to imagine that a reconciliation might be effected without coming to such an explanation as I wished and expected. But while my tongue forbade him my presence, my heart panted to see him, my eyes longed to behold him. His return to Miss Clinton's, and his desire to see me, shewed that he had not forgotten nor forsaken me : his request was, that he might have liberty to explain his conduct,

conduct, and implore my pardon, for having concealed any thing from me. Another circumstance that awakened my pity was, a hint she dropped of his looking as if he had been in great trouble, and not well; that he was pale and emaciated. Every tender sentiment I had ever felt arose to accuse me for having treated him harshly, and all my resentment vanished before for the fear of his safety. The severity I had shewn to him, now became cruelty; and I wished to have an opportunity of convincing him I was not so ill-natured as I appeared to be. These were my sentiments when passion took the lead of reason; but that triumphed again in its turn, and represented to me, that it was necessary I should receive some satisfactory account of those matters which I doubted; and that they should be cleared up before I took a step on which my future happiness and reputation depended; that if I had wronged him by any unjust suspicions, I had it in

my power to make him ample amends, if he preserved the same sentiments for me he had heretofore professed. At all events, I determined to see what the issue of the tremendous day would be, which my aunt had threatened me with, and which would more fully instruct me what M. D'Aubigny's notions were of her conduct to me. I was well convinced that her zeal for Lord Averston, and her desire of being revenged on me for so strenuously opposing all her measures, would induce her to say every thing she could to my prejudice; and also make her, in order to justify herself, heighten the circumstances of my connection with Mr. Benson; and his character I expected would be painted in a very extraordinary light. On the other hand, I resolved to adhere to truth; and if M. D'Aubigny pressed me to it, to inform him honestly of every thing that had passed, avow my regard for Mr. Benson, and at the same time acquaint him with those reasons which hitherto

thereto prevented my gratifying it. In the most disagreeable state of anxious expectations did I pass the time that intervened between the forming these resolutions, and the approach of the day that I looked upon as the day of judgment to me. I heard no more from Mr. Benson in the time. Fanny Clinton had been with me, but said not a word of him. I was afraid to enquire of her concerning him, and submitted to a restraint that was exceedingly grievous. How I should meet the face of the man whom I respected as a parent, and especially as I knew I should be accused of crimes that my heart was a stranger to, and my nature abhorred, was a matter that gave me no small uneasiness. In the midst of the doubts, fears and uncertainties that I laboured under, the morning came. Like the wretch driven to despair, I assumed a courage from the exigency of my circumstances; and that morning I found myself in good spirits, possessed of a confidence

dence that was the result of conscious innocence, and a resolution that enabled me to face my aunt's prejudices and false accusations.

My bosom's lord sat lightly on his throne.

The consequences shewed that I had occasion for all that support, without which I never should have been able to have sustained myself in all the various occurrences of that eventful day. I must venture to say, that my aunt had managed all the under-parts, that were acted that day, though she could not so well controul the principal characters. She had not failed to remind me that morning of her love and attention to me since I had been placed in her care; and added, that the disagreeable transactions of that morning, should any thing occur that might give me offence, were all to be attributed to my own indiscretion, the little regard I ever had to
her

her admonitions, and the improper attachment I had shewn to a man whose character, to say the best of it, was exceedingly dubious. That this application to Mr. D'Aubigny, which she confessed she made, as she perceived she had no longer any power over me, was to acquit herself of any ill consequences that might arise from my pursuing my own inclinations with such obstinacy. I replied, I was very willing to stand any, the severest, trial; for my conduct, though it might be censurable, was not criminal; and was exceedingly pleased to have this opportunity of placing in their true light to Mr. D'Aubigny, facts, that partiality and prejudice might otherwise misrepresent, or exaggerate. How it came about I know not, but our breakfast had been delayed till it was pretty late in the day. We had scarcely finished when Mr. D'Aubigny was introduced into the parlour. The venerable old gentleman approached me directly: he embraced

braced me with real affection, which was not unreturned on my part.

"My dear Matilda," said he, as he pressed me in his arms, "I account myself happy to see you, once more before I retire to my grave, and it is impossible for me to see you, without assuring you that my love for you is as lively as ever, my dear, dear girl."

This address melted me, it was the language of real genuine affection, sounds I had been long unaccustomed to. I could answer him only by my tears. This silent testimony of my regard was sufficient for him, and he seemed to sympathise with me. The moisture that gathered in his eye spoke his feelings: and he pressed my hand, which remained in his, without speaking. He recovered himself, however, in a short time, and turned towards Lady Grigsby, who was standing, a little embarrassed at the tenderness of his address to me, and

I sup-

I suppose chagrined that his first compliments were not paid to her.

" You see, Madam," said he, " that I have waved all causes of quarrel or resentment, and obeyed your summons. I am come to your house at your request: tho' I never thought I should have done so, yet my regard for the interest of Maitilda, which you hinted was at stake, made me break through all my resolutions, and I am here to attend to every thing which you may propose for her benefit."

So abrupt a manner of introducing the business he came about, and openly declaring it was by her invitation, was a circumstance that could not fail to distress her. But she was sufficiently aware of it, and mistress enough of her countenance and behaviour to conceal her disgust.

" Sir," said she, " I am glad to see you here upon whatsoever account you come, and the more so if my dear niece's welfare

" fare

"fare is to be the consequence of your
"visit. Pray, Sir, be seated."

He took a chair, and Lady Grigsby rang for a servant to take away the breakfast-things, and in the silence that prevailed during that time, she seemed to recollect herself, and prepare for the manner in which she should address Mr. D'Aubigny, in order to render him favourable to her wishes. You know my aunt is deficient neither in sense nor art, and they were both united in an extraordinary degree upon this occasion.

"Sir," continued she, when we were left to ourselves, "the long time my niece has been under my care, and the attention I have ever paid to her, leaves no room, at this day, to tax me with partiality or prejudice. Heaven having blessed me with no offspring of my own, she has filled the place of a child; I knew nothing dearer to me than she was, than she is. For, till lately, well
"has

“ has she fulfilled the offices that a parent
“ has a right to expect from a child ;
“ her duty, her obedience, her observance
“ of even my slightest wishes, shewed her
“ affection for me, while they claimed, and
“ merited every return of love and fond-
“ ness it was in my power to make her.
“ Till lately she was all my hopes could
“ desire, all my wishes could demand, all my
“ most sanguine imagination could paint of
“ perfection in a woman. Nor has she as
“ yet, I trust, fallen from that state : and
“ to prevent it is the cause why I desired
“ to see you here. Why she is in danger,
“ as far as I know it is my busines to
“ explain, as well as to clear myself from
“ the suspicion of acting with any pas-
“ sion or malevolence. A Lord Averston,
“ about three years ago, saw Matilda at
“ some public place. He could not see
“ her without acknowledging the power
“ of her charms. He enquired into her
“ character and situation in life, with that
“ pre-

"precision and eagerness, which shewed
"that his designs were honourable: and
"the accounts that he received hav-
"ing proved satisfactory, he waited upon
"me as her guardian, her parent, and her
"friend; and having explained his inten-
"tions, in a manner wholly unexception-
"able, I could not deny him the privilege
"of visiting my niece. His Lordship's cha-
"racter and interest, and the distinguished
"rank he enjoys, and which in the estima-
"tion of the world he justly merits, made
"me consider him as a proper match for
"her. His manners are engaging, his per-
"son amiable, and few men possess supe-
"rior qualifications. I did not doubt but
"he would stand a fair chance of succeed-
"ing with Matilda; as she did not seem to
"pay any great attention or deference to
"those who at that time were very assidu-
"ously cultivating her good opinion. A
"short time convinced me that I was right
"in my conjectures. The encouragement
"she

“ she gave her new admirer, the pleasure
“ she took in his company, and the pre-
“ ference her taste and good sense obliged
“ her to allow him, soon banished those whom
“ vanity or lucrative views attached to her.
“ He reigned in her good graces alone, and
“ his competitors only silently envied the
“ happiness they could not aspire to. This
“ gave me a great deal of pleasure, and I
“ waited only to learn from Matilda’s mouth
“ the circumstances of this honourable
“ transaction; and did not doubt but she
“ would have confidence enough in me to
“ make me acquainted with the success of
“ an affair that I was much interested in,
“ and of which the whole world took no-
“ tice, congratulating me on the prospect
“ of being allied to a noble and ancient fa-
“ mily, while her own sex silently grieved
“ at the preference given to her by a young
“ Nobleman, who was the wish of their
“ hearts in private. This was the scene of
“ happiness that was displayed to my view
“ before

“ before it was interrupted.—I cannot think
“ of it without a sigh ; especially when I
“ reflect on the change that succeeded it,
“ and the many evil consequences it occa-
“ sioned. Lord Averston was always at
“ this house, was always of our parties,
“ had arrived to a degree of intimacy and
“ familiarity that his long and assiduous at-
“ tention so justly deserved. One night, at
“ Ranelagh, he was along with us, and a
“ Mr. Benson, a perfect stranger to us be-
“ fore that hour, happened to see Matilda.
“ The same charms which attracted the
“ notice of others, happened also to engage
“ his attention. He was then in company
“ with a young Gentleman of a good for-
“ tune, but one of the most abandoned li-
“ bertines in town, to whose vices I sup-
“ pose he is a convenient friend, and from
“ whom I have reason to imagine, by what
“ I have since learned, he draws his prin-
“ cipal support. They followed us about
“ the room ; and when the time for with-

" drawing caine, they followed us out
" also. In the crowd we escaped from
" Lord Averston, who had us under his
" protection, and Sir Marmaduke was ef-
" corting us to the door. An unhappy
" scuffle among the servants prevented our
" getting to our carriage, and Sir Marma-
" duke attempting to interfere, was knocked
" down.

" This Mr. Benson saw our danger, and
" politely offered his assistance and protec-
" tion. And having saved Sir Marmaduke
" from being ill treated, secured the fel-
" low who had insulted him, and put us in
" safety into our coach. I could not help
" paying him those acknowledgments his
" services merited ; and I, in an evil hour,
" invited him to sup with us. He obeyed ;
" and from that hour I date my subsequent
" misfortunes, and the dangers that are
" about to threaten Matilda. I must con-
" fess he is handsome, and has much
" the appearance of a gentleman ; but
" there is a simple rusticity about him that

" is exceedingly disgusting to me. From
" that moment Matilda has no longer paid
" any regard to her former conduct and
" behaviour to Lord Averston: she has
" carried on a correspondence with this
" man, who, by every account we can
" learn of him, is an adventurer. We can-
" not trace out who he is; for he is un-
" known to every body. In vain have I
" represented to her the cruelty, the injus-
" tice of her behaviour to Lord Averston:
" she attends not to any thing I can say.
" This worthless fellow has wholly engaged
" her, and she disregards every thing that
" opposes her sentiments; which I cannot
" avoid calling base and ungenerous. To
" remove her from the presence of a man
" whom I had reason to dread, from the
" influence he had over her, I took her
" down to Greenhill-Park. Our journey
" was sudden and private; nor did she
" know of our intention till we were a great
" way from town. In the quiet retirement

“ of the country I hoped she would be re-
“ stored to herself ; that she would forget
“ the cause of her woes and mine. It was
“ quite the contrary ; for I know he visited
“ her there by stealth, invited thither, I
“ suppose, by herself ; and in the face of a
“ country where she should support the
“ character of virtue, discretion, and repu-
“ tation, which she had gained, and so long
“ enjoyed, did she carry on a shameful in-
“ trigue with a strange man of abandoned
“ morals and an infamous character. The
“ care we took to detect her by the vigi-
“ lance of Lord Averston, who attended
“ her in the country, in hopes to reinspire
“ her with a sense of her duty, and a pro-
“ per regard to her former behaviour, was
“ eluded by the art and dexterity of this
“ man, who must have been in many more
“ scrapes of the same kind, by the manner
“ in which he extricated himself from this.
“ It was also very near being attended with
“ very dangerous consequences to Lord

“ Averston,

" Averston, who was assaulted by an Irish
" ruffian whom he hired. The reward
" which Lord Averston offered for appre-
" hending him put a stop to their conec-
" tions for some time ; but since she has
" arrived in town she has renewed her for-
" mer correspondence. The utmost dan-
" ger is to be apprehended from the conse-
" quences of it ; and more especially, as I
" am totally unable to prevent the conti-
" nuance of it. To remedy these matters,
" Sir, is the cause why I have troubled
" you ; and I am sure you must be trou-
" bled to think that your favourite Matilda
" is even inclined to take such courses as
" must inevitably involve her in ruin and
" woe, and entail disgrace and shame upon
" her friends. I feel for you at this mo-
" ment ; I know what your heart must suf-
" fer ; I know what I have suffered my-
" self."

She ceased. Tears, which arose from another source than that of regard to me, fell from her eyes. A silence ensued. I have been very particular in this address of my aunt's to Mr. D'Aubigny, as there were many misrepresentations in it, and she had advanced every thing that could serve to gain his belief on the occasion. I was astonished at her easy method of telling things before me which she knew in her heart to be false, and was sensible I could so easily refute. However, she thought to prepossess him by telling the first story, and was in hopes that every thing I might advance afterwards would be disregarded. I continued silent, in order to hear what Mr. D'Aubigny should reply. He seemed to reflect on what my aunt had said. At length he addressed her.

“ I am exceedingly sorry, Madam, that
“ Matilda has given you cause to accuse
“ her in this manner, or has occasioned you
“ so much uneasiness. I hope she has not
“ been

" been so blind to her own interest and happiness as you represent her, or engaged " in such unwarrantable connexions."

" You may depend upon it, Sir, that " what I have related to you is really true, " and she is so conscious of it, that she " does not attempt to deny it."

" What, Matilda," said Mr. D'Aubigny, " do you allow in silence the truth of " your aunt's accusations ? I hope you will " be able to clear yourself."

Thus called upon, I undertook my own vindication; and enumerated the persecutions I had undergone upon account of Lord Averston; assuring Mr. D'Aubigny that he was my aversion at this day, and had ever been so. I confessed that Mr. Benson had been exceedingly assiduous in obtaining my good opinion ; and that he had succeeded : but that I had never done any thing which could impeach either my reputation or discretion ; that his character and connexions were not fully known to me ; and that I

had made that the cause why I could no longer listen to him till they were properly explained.

“ And now, Sir, I have opened my heart
“ to you, and have acknowledged that
“ Mr. Benson has made himself agreeable
“ to me ; and believe me, I should never
“ have submitted to the apparent shame of
“ carrying on a private correspondence,
“ had not the continual persecution of my
“ aunt forced me to it. You know not,
“ Sir, what I have suffered, or how much
“ she has importuned me in favour of a
“ man I never can have any regard for.
“ I believe Mr. Benson is a Gentleman,
“ though his fortune may be inferior to
“ mine. He has promised to inform me
“ who he is, and has assured me that his
“ family will not disgrace mine. Whoever
“ he is, though he may have deceived me,
“ none of my friends will have occasion to
“ blush at any connexions between us.

“ Matilda !”

“ Matilda !” said he, with a grave and severe tone of voice, “ these professions from men of no characters are very common, and you should not have been imposed upon by such a stale artifice : it gives me pain to hear you call your good aunt’s attention to your welfare, and her care for your interest, a persecution. It is an happy thing that her vigilance prevented the ill consequences that might have arisen from your imprudent connexion with such a man.”

“ I doubted not but your prudence would approve the steps I had taken for my niece’s good. You must observe the danger that would attend the suffering a matter of this kind to go on any further.”

I was preparing to speak, when a message was brought from Lord Averston, enquiring after our healths. Lady Grigsby mentioned it as a proof of his attention.

“ Is there any possibility of seeing him here,” said Mr. D’Aubigny: “ for as we are talking about him, it may not be improper for him to be here, that I may hear what proposals he makes to Matilda.”

“ He will come directly, if we send for him,” replied my aunt; her eyes sparkling with joy at the countenance he had given her. A message was dispatched to Lord Averston, desiring his company,

“ It is insupportable, Mr. D’Aubigny, to bring a man here whom I cannot respect, who has been the cause of all the uneasiness I have suffered; and to tax me with my follies, and upbraid me with my weakness before him is a degree of humiliation I cannot, I will not subject myself to. You must excuse me if I am obliged to quit the room. Great as the pleasure is I take in your company, and happy as I should be to see you

"you were not this the subject. I will
"not submit to this treatment."

"Stay, Matilda," said he; "you shall
"not suffer any humiliation: you shall be
"treated as you merit."

"If Mr. Benson was to come," added
my aunt, "she would stay without being
"pressed to it."

"That reproach, unjust and unmerited,
"shews what I am to expect if I remain
"here. Though I hope you are not pre-
"judiced against me, Sir, and I know
"your good heart will not suffer you to join
"in distressing me, yet I have every thing
"to fear from Lady Grigsby's partiality
"in favour of Lord Averston, and her
"design of mortifying me."

I rose and went towards the door. Be-
fore I could open it, Lady Wilmington,
accompanied by another Lady, entered:
I at once divined the cause of her visit,
and fancied I saw through the contrivance
of her coming on this particular day. It

L. 6. was

was the part she had to play in the grand scheme that was to be displayed. That thought gave me fresh courage, fresh spirits. I received her with pleasure, and unconcern. After the usual compliments, she expressed a desire of speaking to me alone.

“ Your business with me, Madam, is
“ no secret here. This gentleman, Mr.
“ D’Aubigny, is my guardian, my friend;
“ you know Lady Grigsby is my aunt:
“ before these, my good friends, I have
“ no secret, no concern that I wish to
“ hide.”

“ You are the best judge, Madam.
“ This is the young Lady whom I pro-
“ mised to bring to you; but as the af-
“ fair may be unknown to this gentleman,
“ it is necessary I should, in some mea-
“ sure, explain it to him.”

She then touched slightly on the par-
ticulars of the story which she had be-
fore related to me, and which has been
been

been communicated to you. When she had finished, she applied to Miss Seaton.

"I know not," said that Lady, "the cause of exposing the frailty of my departed friend. Lady Wilmington informed me that I should hear of Mr. Benson here, or know where to find him. My friend, in her last moments, gave me a letter directed to him, and charged me to deliver it into his own hands. Her mouth was full of his praises: and though she suffered severely by him, yet she loved him. The unhappy fruit of their passions is abandoned to the world without a friend: and this letter," taking it from her pocket-book, "is to recommend it to his humanity."

"Barbarous man!" exclaimed Lady Grigsby, "to ruin and abandon the unhappy Lady."

"You would have pitied her," said Lady Wilmington, "if you had known her. Her manners were amiable, her person

“ person was lovely, and there must have
“ been great art and dissimulation practised,
“ before she fell into the villainous snare
“ he laid for her.”

“ It was base,” added Mr. D’Aubigny
“ Did she complain of him? Did she
“ not accuse him of falsehood, of perfi-
“ dy?”

“ She might, and I not know it. I
“ suppose her letter will upbraid him.”

“ You had better open it, Matilda.”
said my aunt.

“ Not for the world, Madam; it is a
“ liberty I would not pretend to take
“ with Mr. Benson, were he my husband.
“ I shall not attempt such a thing while
“ he is a stranger to me.”

“ I cannot,” said Miss Seaton, “ give
“ it into any person’s hands but his; it is
“ directed to, consistent with, my promise
“ to my dying friend.”

“ Then the contents, “ added Lady
“ Wilmington, “ must remain a secret,
“ till

"till Mr. Benson can explain them to
"us."

"Pray, Matilda," said Mr. D'Aubigny,
"how came Lady Wilmington acquainted
"with your knowledge of Mr. Benson
"so well, as to take this trouble of in-
"informing you of his true character, and
"bringing this young Lady to you with
"such proofs of his perfidy and baseness
"to a Lady whom he has injured?"

"You must ask her, Sir, for she can
"best tell you."

"An affair of honour which Mr. Ben-
"son and Lord Averston had together,
"and Miss Conyers being mentioned as
"the cause of it, knowing his baseness,
"I determined to acquaint her with his
"real character."

"It was exceedingly kind of you to
"warn her to shun the evils others of
"your sex have experienced by his means.
"I hope she will be on her guard."

"I

"I am obliged to Lady Wilmington
"for her care, but it was unnecessary."

"I am sorry, Miss," said she, with an air which spoke her chagrin at the little importance I held her services of, "that I have taken up so much of your time, or have exposed the fame of an unhappy woman, who was of my family, when you seem to consider the information of so little consequence."

"You mistake, Miss Conyers," said my aunt. "I suppose she has been also deceived by him, and wanted no further proofs of what he is capable of."

"I am sure," added Mr. D'Aubigny, "Matilda has gratitude enough to value your services, Madam, and esteem them as she ought."

"I hope she has," replied Lady Wilmington; "for had I not respected her character, and feared so many charms should become the prey of a man so base, so —"

At that moment a carriage stopped at the door. I thought it was Lord Averston's, and was preparing to leave the room.

"Stay, Matilda," said Mr. D'Aubigny, "I insist upon your staying here—rely upon me to see you used as you deserve."

I obeyed him, and resumed my chair. A servant coming in, told me that the Dutchess of M—, and Lady Stanton were at the door desiring to see me.

"Me! You must mistake; I have not the honour of being known to either of them."

"They enquired for you, Madam."

"See them, by all means, Matilda," said Mr. D'Aubigny. "I have seen her Grace," said Lady Grigsby. The words were hardly uttered, when in came the Dutchess, followed by an old Lady, the benevolence of whose countenance prepossessed the beholder in her favour. But who think you was close behind her but Benson himself.

The

The moment I fixed my eyes on him, I trembled : my knees refused to support my weight, my whole frame was disordered. Mr. Benson, who I suppose saw the change in my countenance, and pre-saged the effect his sudden appearance would have on me, payed attention only to my situation, and prevented my falling to the floor, by running towards me and catching me in his arms. This, I imagine, interrupted Lady Grigsby in her train of compliments to the Dutchesf, with whom she was so taken up, that she did not mind me. However, she assisted in recovering me : and when I came to myself, my distress was encreased at finding myself still supported by Mr. Benson. If there was a moment of my life in which his presence was capable of overwhelming me with shame and confusion, it was that in which he appeared, when our mouths were full of him, and his conduct had been so severely arraigned. I thanked him for the trouble

trouble he had taken, and disengaged myself from him. He bowed, but spoke not. His heart was too full, his eyes seemed filling too, they uttered the most tender language, but they also accused me. I was about to make an apology for my beeing taken ill, when Mr. Benson, turning about to take his chair, exclaimed,

"Asgill! my friend Asgill here! Ah, "what have I to accuse you of."

"Much," replied Mr. D'Aubigny, with a smile. "But be composed, and I will "explain myself."

These words were mysterious to us. It appeared there was not only an intimacy, but a friendship subsisting between the two gentlemen. Surprised at their transactions, neither of the Ladies had been feated.

"I know not, Madam, how I shall apologize for my behaviour."

"There is no occasion to offer any excuse for it," Miss Conyers, said her Grace,

Grace, taking me by the hand, and placing me in the chair next to that which she assumed herself. Lady Stanton seated herself on the other side of me.

"I know not to what cause I shall attribute the honour your Grace has done me."

I was so much agitated as I spoke, that my words were scarce intelligible. My eyes were fixed on the floor, for I dreaded looking up. Had you seen your poor friend, at that moment, Caroline, her state was truly pitiable.

"You yourself are the only cause: the merits of Miss Conyers should be universally respected. However, my dear," added she, in a lower voice, "your behaviour has partly explained the cause of my visit."

This answer did not serve to compose me. Lady Grigsby remained silent all this time: she knew not what to do, nor could she guess what would be the termination of

of this extraordinary meeting. Indeed an universal silence prevailed, Each fearful of speaking, each waiting till some person began to join in the conversation.— At length Lady Wilmington addressed Mr. D'Aubigny.

“ I think Sir I have had the honour
“ of seeing you at Sir Thomas Mitcomb’s
“ sometimes; but the change of your name,
“ and the alteration of some other circum-
“ stances, misled me, and I hardly knew
“ you again.”

“ You have seen me there, Madam:
“ your father was my friend. Mr. Ben-
“ son, you have not forgotten Lady Wil-
“ mington.”

“ No, certainly; but my attention was
“ so much taken up, that I have unhap-
“ pily not been collected enough to pay
“ my compliments to her Ladyship in a
“ proper manner.”

“ Perhaps it might have been more
“ agreeable to Mr. Benson to have for-
“ gotten

"gotten me," replied she with a sneer, which was far from discomposing him.

"I know no cause," said he, "that should make me so."

"These Ladies have been hinting a very different story, and giving a very different account, Mr. Benson. There is one part of that Lady's family whom I suppose you would not chuse to remember."

"You surprise me! I believe not."

"Recollect yourself."

"I must declare there is not."

"Ah, Sir," said Lady Wilmington, preventing Mr. D'Aubigny's reply, or explanation of the matter, "spare me, spare the memory of my unhappy friend; do not expose her frailties, and load me with shame."

"Madam," returned he, "the unhappy Lady has payed the tribute of her follies, if they were such, and justice should be done to her. She has left her commands for this Gentleman; and this

young

"young Lady should be informed that
"the letter she is entrusted with is ad-
"dressed to him. He has been accused
"in public, Lady Wilmington. He should
"meet with public censure for his mis-
"deeds, or be publicly cleared of the im-
"putations he at present labours under."

"Now," said Mr. Benson, starting up,
"I am at no loss to account for the evils
"that have befallen me."

As he spoke, Lord Averston entered the room. It is impossible to describe the astonishment that was visible in his countenance, at seeing Mr. Benson, the company that was present, and hearing the latter end of his speech. His Lordship's presence did not prevent his proceeding.

"I am no stranger to the many base and
"villainous arts that have been practised
"to traduce me. But this is the last hour
"in which they can pretend to have any
"longer existence. Truth must at last
"burst through this cloud of calumny
"and

" and prejudice, however thick and dark,
" and here am I to abide the test."

Lord Averston, who was not a stranger to the plan of proceedings, and the scheme that was to have been executed, was not a little chagrined to find it interrupted in such an extraordinary manner by the unexpected appearance of Mr. Benson. However he was distressed in his presence, he shewed it as little as possible; and bowing politely to Mr. Benson as he passed him, crossed the room to pay his respects to the Dutchess whom he was known to, then bowing to all the company round, took a chair without any signs of discomposure, though I cannot imagine his heart was much at ease. As his appearance had in some measure checked the conversation, a general silence ensued. Mr. Benson still remained standing waiting the reply to his address, but finding nobody spoke, he applied to Mr. D'Aubigny.

" You

" You mentioned a lady had a letter for
" me, and hinted something of accusa-
" tions."

" This lady, Sir—That is Mr. Benson,
" Madam."

The poor girl rose to deliver him the letter, but she was so much agitated that it droped from her trembling hands before she could reach it to him. He took it up.

" This letter is for me, Madam. Pray
" who is it from?"

" Mrs. Adderley, Sir." Her words dying on her tongue ;" she added, with a faltering voice, " it was her last request
" to me to deliver it into your hands, and
" I have now fulfilled it."

" Compose yourself, Madam," said he, leading her to her chair, " and be not afraid to declare what I am not afraid to
" hear. You said it was her last request.
" My heart presages a mournful conse-
" quence from those words. Does she
" live?"

“ Alas, she is no more.”

He seemed much affected at these words. He hung his head, and appeared buried in thought. Lady Wilmington roused him from his reverie. “ Your heart “ might also have presaged, Sir, that her “ death was accelerated by the means “ of a base and vile destroyer; that she “ could not outlive the aggravated woes “ of being betrayed and abandoned. “ Her wrongs are not buried with her, “ they survive in me. Injuries like those “ she suffered, can never be overcome by “ a generous spirit. Death can only re- “ store peace to a bosom that is torn with “ the reflection of being deceived and “ forsaken by those we love.”

“ Unhappy woman,” said he, with a mournful tone of voice; “ I lament thy fate: “ I lament also that you are thus misrepre- “ sented; but I will trust to this evidence to “ acquit us both. This is her hand,” said he, “ looking attentively at the superscription of
the

letter. "I once before was honoured with
"a letter from her, and this character is
"exactly like her's. Now to the proof:
"Madam," continued he, turning to me,
"as all this affair has been laid together
"to prejudice me in your good opinion,
"and as I happily have come time enough
"to clear up this matter, I shall entreat
"the favour of you to break open this
"letter, and to judge from the contents of
"it whether I deserve the character that
"lady has given me."

He held the letter towards me, but had
he given me the world I could not have
broke the seal.

"I beg you will excuse me," was all I
was capable of saying. He saw and re-
lieved my confusion.

"Mr. Asgill, if I am to know you by
"that name any longer, let me beg you
"to perform that friendly office, and com-
"municate the contents of it."

"With pleasure," said he, pulling out his spectacles, and making the necessary preparations for reading the tremendous epistle, which was to fix the fate of Mr. Benson. All remained buried in attention, as still, as silent as death. He read:

"A generous mind, conscious of having
"offended, cannot pardon itself. All at-
"tempts to disguise or palliate actions
"which will not bear the test, are vain.
"Truth and virtue will not suffer an im-
"position of that nature; self-accusation,
"self-conviction will not be silent; and
"remorse and horror are the consequences
"of these upbraidings. In vain, Benson,
"did I think by flying into the country
"to lose the remembrance of my trans-
"gression. Solitude gave me only more
"leisure to reflect on the part I had acted,
"and shame and repentance came too late.
"I had not forgotten you, and the recol-
"lection that in giving way to the im-
"pulse

" pulse of passion, I had rendered myself
" unworthy of you, encreased my trou-
" ble. Alas, Benson, I was cheap in your
" eyes, I was despicable in my own. Shame
" and confusion waited on me in my most
" retired privacies; and though conceal-
" ed from you, and the rest of the world,
" yet the self-approving heart was wanting,
" and I shunned every body. These humili-
" liating reflections would alone have de-
" stroyed me: and they began to operate,
" for my health visibly decayed, when I
" found a witness of our unhappy loves
" would contribute to propagate his mo-
" ther's dishonour. Nature and humanity
" forbade me to destroy an innocent. He
" may live perhaps to execrate his wretched
" parent, and curse her name that has entail-
" ed disgrace on him. The thought is too
" dreadful to support! Can I live to meet my
" child's reproaches? Can I survive his
" upbraiding? Yet, Benson, dear Ben-
" son, I could have lived for his sake, for

" the sake of the image of his lovely fa-
" ther; at this moment the object of my
" wishes, the delight of my heart. I could
" wish to live only upon that account:
" but it is now too late. I die, adorable
" youth—I die—Farewell—In parting
" with you, and your dear representative,
" I relinquish every thing that is dear to
" me. Grieve not at the punishment I
" have inflicted on myself: as mine was the
" guilt, mine should be the suffering.
" You made me no vows, I have none to
" absolve you from; nor should you have
" heard from me now, but to recommend the
" boy to your care and protection, who
" may one day prove himself worthy to be
" your son. I know your worth, your ho-
" nour: short a time as I was acquainted
" with you I saw your virtues. They will
" not suffer you to load my memory with
" an unkind reflection, and your genero-
" sity will make you conceal from the
" poor child his unhappy mother's faults.

" One

"One thing more, never let my cousin,
"whom I must look upon as the cause of
"my fall, know my weakness. Lady
"Wilmington will triumph in having ef-
"caped the snare that entangled me. Her
"heart is too callous to experience any of
"those delicate sensations that may arise
"from love, friendship, or pity. Let not
"that ungenerous heart rejoice in my dis-
"grace. I need not recommend your
"child to you any more: your tenderness
"will exceed my wishes, and I am in no
"fear for his welfare, or the treatment he
"will receive from you on his mother's
"account. The lady who gives you this
"has the care of him at present, and will
"direct you where to find him, that is the
"reason why I have enjoined her to deliver
"this into your own hands.

"My cares are now over: my account
"with this world is settled, and I trust my
"sufferings here will expiate my crimes in
"the next. Once more adieu. Live long

“ and happy, live for the sake of the poor
“ child who depends totally on you his
“ only friend, as a friend only ; for I have
“ taken care that he shall not be chargea-
“ ble to you. If when you read this,
“ Benson, much-loved Benson, you shall
“ shed one tear to my memory, it will be
“ an ample recompence for all the woes
“ sustained by

“ ARA. ADDERLEY.”

He ceased. During the reading of this letter, Mr. Benson, whose soul was all attentive to Mr. D'Aubigny's words, was so much affected as he read, that the tears fell from his eyes, I believe unknown to him ; mine were not dry.

“ One tear,” said he, when he recovered himself, “ a thousand ! unhappy woman, whose memory has been so unjustly ac-
“ cused, so basely traduced, to answer the
“ vilest purposes. And, but for the clear-
“ ing of my own fame, where it is neces-
“ sary

“ fary to my existence to have a just opinion of me established, I would not have exposed that letter for a world. Your commands shall be sacred, much-lamented shade ! I will obey them to the utmost of my power. It is now my business to apologize to you, Madam,” continued he, addressing me, “ for rushing so unexpectedly into your presence : but I could abstain from seeing you no longer. I came here to do justice to myself, and to wipe away those aspersions which have been so falsely, so injuriously thrown upon me. Behold in me, Madam, no longer the needy, infamous adventurer, a man who exceeds in fortune and rank any of his rivals to your favour : but who is most wretched in that very circumstance, if he shall find that the faults committed by George Benson cannot be expiated by Earl Stanton ; a title that will be only additional misery to me, if I cannot share it with you.”

M 5

I would,

I would, if I could, explain to you the various passions that hurried through my breast at that moment. It is impossible: they were pleasing, they were distressing. I could not speak; I knew not what to say, had I been able. My poor heart fluttered to that degree, I was in a state of absolute pain. Mr. D'Aubigny, who I suppose saw doubt and surprize in the countenances of the company at this declaration, stepped forwards:

"It is true," said he, "I know it to be true. Rise, Matilda."

I knew not his intent; but obeyed him without hesitating. He took me by the hand, and led me towards Lord Stanton.

"I have been, under another character, the witness to the affection this Noble-man has entertained for you, Matilda. I know his virtue, his honour: they are untainted. His love, his fidelity, are uncommon in this age: they are the more to be prized. This Lady, young Lord,

"is

" is my ward, my relation : she loves you.
" But learn the value of the gift she is go-
" ing to make you, and which I accord to.
" In this good, this lovely girl, you see
" the daughter of that friend whose loss I
" to this hour lament, whose memory I re-
" vere and honour. In her you see the
" daughter of the virtuous, the adorable
" Adeline, whose fate you have wept. She
" is the representative of all her mother's
" good qualities. Look down, blessed spi-
" rits of my departed friends, from where
" you sit enthroned in bliss : approve my
" act, and see me with pleasure join their
" hands ; inspire them with your virtues,
" and they must be happy. Take her,
" Stanton, take her from my hands. May
" your days be crowned with bliss and
" joy !"

He could speak no more. Tears, which ran down his venerable cheeks, choaked his utterance : he laid his hands upon our heads in a silent rapture of joy.

"I will take her," said Lord Stanton,
"as the best, the choicest gift of heaven;
"as that I will respect, as that I will love
"her."

I could not refuse his embrace.

"But yet, Matilda, there is another duty
"to pay. My mother will not refuse to
"bles^s her child."

He led me to Lady Stanton. The good
Lady was dissolved in tears of tenderness.
We spontaneously sunk before her.

"My children, my dear children," said
she, "my prayers shall never fail to ascend
"to heaven to crown you with everlasting
"happiness."

She raised and embraced me. The
Duchess took me from her, and complimented
herself on the prospect of being al-
lied to me. Lady Stanton approached
Mr. D'Aubigny.

"What thanks are to be given to you,
"Sir, who have conferred such an inestim-
"able gift on my son?"

"None,

“ None, my Lady. I have done your son justice, and congratulate you on his happiness. But as I am to do justice, rewards cannot attend every body. This Lady, Lord Stanton, is the sister of Mr. Harper, as that is his daughter; whose name was changed to Conyers, to possess an estate. How then will you, Lady Grigsby, be able to answer for the just execution of the trust he reposed in you? Was it to persecute his child, and to render her unhappy, that he committed the care of her to you? Words are incapable of expressing my sense of your conduct, or the resentment I have entertained. But for Matilda's sake I shall be silent. Lady Wilmington should have taken care to have matters placed in a clearer light, before she undertook the invidious attempt that has been so happily defeated and exposed. To her I leave the stings of disappointed envy and malice.”

“ I did

“ I did not imagine, Lady Grigsby, that
“ you would suffer this old ruffian to in-
“ sult me in your house. Miss Seaton, let
“ us leave them to themselves.”

“ I have some businses with Lord Stan-
“ ton, Madam, and choose to stay be-
“ hind.”

“ Then take your choice,” replied she in
a rage, as she flew out of the room. Lord
Averston had been a silent spectator of what
it is to be supposed was not very agreeable
to him, and rose to take his leave.

“ Stay, my Lord. I made bold to have
“ you sent for; and, before you go, I
“ must beg leave to return you this packet
“ of your letters. Mr. Rogers, who dis-
“ claims all further connexion or acquain-
“ tance with your Lordship, charged me
“ to deliver them into your own hands.
“ You know the contents too well to desire
“ to have them exposed.”

“ I equally despise your insinuations,”
replied he, with some warmth, putting the
letters

letters in his pocket at the same time, "and
"the anger of the ungenerous rascal who
"betrayed my confidence. I can see, Sir,
"that the design of sending for me here
"was to insult me; but I would have you
"know, Sir, that I will not suffer it, or
"any other attempt to injure my fame, to
"go unpunished."

As he seemed to include Lord Stanton in his threat, he replied, he was very willing to answer as Lord Stanton, what he had done as Mr. Benson.

" You will have occasion for all your
" fortitude, Lord Averston," said Mr.
D'Aubigny. " Mr. Bingham is in town:
" he has discovered the wrongs you have
"done his daughter, and you will have an
"injured father also to account with."

This seemed to stagger him a little. But he soon recovered himself.

" If I stay here any longer," said he,
"my rage will get the better of my reason;
" and

" and the respect I owe these Ladies. I
" know my time."

He bowed politely to the Ladies, and
left the scene of his disgrace.

" Those letters, Madam" said Mr. D'Aubigny, addressing himself to Lady Grigsby,
" contain very severe strictures upon your
conduct, though he bargained with you to
" be his friend."

She was too much humbled even to venture at a reply. Miss Seaton then began to apologize for the part she had been constrained to act in this manner ; assuring us that, had she followed Lady Wilmington's directions in every particular, she should have more cause to be ashamed of her conduct. She was soon made perfectly easy on that score ; and Lady Stanton took her aside, I suppose to enquire after the child that had been committed to her care.

" It is necessary," said Mr. D'Aubigny,
" before we go any farther, to explain to
" you, Lord Stanton, my reason for going

"under the name of Asgill for so long a
"time. You have heard me give an ac-
"count of myself already. In the many
"troubles and distresses which I experien-
"ced, I found it very convenient to assume
"a name foreign to my own. It was this
"which I took. When the kindness and
"generosity of my friend rendered me inde-
"pendent, I resumed my family-name.
"He committed this daughter, the child
"at whose birth, her mother, never-enough
"to be lamented, left this world, to the
"care of his sister; nevertheless giving me
"a controuling power over all her actions.
"This trust has employed all my time and
"thoughts since his death. She has been
"my only care; and my friendship for
"that charming couple, perpetuated in
"this their offspring, has reconciled me to
"the world. She was heiress to a great
"fortune; and the relation, who insisted
"she should change her name to Conyers,
"encreased it. It appeared evidently to
me,

" me, that when I became the ostensible
" guardian to a Lady so lovely in herself,
" and with the additional attraction of a
" large fortune, I should be continually fo-
" licited on her account. I determined to
" let her please herself, after having given
" her an education that should enable her
" to judge between right and wrong. To
" pursue my plan, I took my former name,
" and never appeared in public in my real
" character. Mr. D'Aubigny was no where
" to be found, whilst Matilda knew that
" I had a power of preventing any thing
" being done to prejudice her, or con-
" strain her inclinations. I thank heaven,
" every thing has turned out happily. Now
" I have no more to manage, and will
" retire to my grave in peace."

" No, my friend," replied Lord Stanton,
embracing him, " live long, live with us,
" and be to the daughter of your friend,
" and the man you have made happy in
" the

"the possession of her, what you were to
"her father and the lovely Adeline."

"Come, come," said the Dutchesse, "we
"have had sufficient explanations at pre-
"sent, let us finish them at some other
"time. I insist upon your all going to
"dinner with me. We shall be alone,
"for the Duke is gone into the country
"this morning."

Mr. Benson,—I mean Lord Stanton;
I shall always call him Benson, tho', looked at me to demand my consent.

"If Lady Grigsby went."

Lady Grigsby was all compliance. Her Grace, Lady Stanton, Lady Grigsby and I, went in the Dutchesse's coach. Miss Seaton excused herself. Mr. D'Aubigny and Lord Stanton, in an elegant chariot that had been just built for him. In the afternoon, under pretence of shewing me some original paintings, which he said the Duke had lately purchased, he drew me into

into a room, at a distance from the company.

"Now, Miss Conyers," said he, "I must entreat you to regard a reality instead of a representation. Happy as I have been this day in the kindness of Mr. D'Aubigny, yet I have had the mortification to find you passive."

I was going to repeat this conversation to you; but I cannot, Caroline, shame prevents me, ~~not I was~~ too condescending to him. But, in truth, there was no resisting him. I will bury it in silence therefore, and leave it to your imagination to judge of the raptures that inspire two virtuous hearts mutually enamoured of truth and each other. ~~not I was~~

In looking over what I have been writing, I am afraid my sweet friend will find me sometimes too circumstantial and tedious; she must pardon and indulge me in the pleasure I take in repeating those transactions from which I have derived

so much happiness. I would also tell you how happy I am, if I could find words to express my sense of it, or this paper was able to contain it. But you must be tired of reading it by this time. Then, adieu, Caroline, and be assured that no change of place or station shall prevent my being still and ever thy affectionate friend,

MATILDA CONYERS.



L E T T E R XCV.

To JAMES HILGROVE, Esq.

[This letter to Mr. Hilgrove contains the recapitulation of what had passed to the same purport as that of Miss Conyers; but her letter being more circumstantial the Editor preferred it. He has therefore omitted the first part of this letter and only commences it where Miss Conyers leaves off.]

A

A Change so exceedingly unexpected would have rendered me truly happy, had my suspicions been quieted on one head. I had observed, that Matilda's behaviour, during the scene which I have very faithfully described to you, seemed to be entirely passive. She obeyed the commands of her guardian, whom from henceforth I shall call by his real name of D'Aubigny, without hesitation. This conduct was so very foreign from that I had been taught from her declaration to Miss Clinton, that I could not reconcile it to myself. I made every allowance for her agitation, and the confusion she must necessarily have undergone, at coming to an explanation before a company to the greater part of which she was a stranger. In short I wanted to have that business explained, and to know whether she really possessed the same sentiments for me that she had before my abrupt retreat. The acceptance of the Dutchess's invitation, by Lady Grigsby,
gave

gave me an opportunity of learning what I wanted to know. After dinner I found a means of engaging Miss Conyers alone under pretence of shewing her some original pictures, which the Duke had lately purchased. I expressed the sense of my happiness, and rejoiced in the unexpected alteration in my affairs :

“ But, Matilda, I have not yet had
“ the joy to hear that your heart has ap-
“ proved the disposition made by Mr.
“ D’Aubigny, nor do I yet know whether
“ you have revoked the cruel sentence
“ you passed against me.”

I paused : she was silent also as if waiting for the conclusion of what I was to say : and finding that I had finished ;

“ You are exceeding ingenious in tor-
“ menting yourself,” said she, with a
smile. “ To what purpose ? I know of
“ none : only tell me, Lord Stanton, what
“ you require.”

“ I want to hear you acknowledge that

" you were imposed upon by my enemies,
" and that I did not deserve that appear-
" ance of resentment."

" But what apology are you to make
" for having imposed upon me? Or if
" you have really suffered as you pretend
" you have, how will you excuse it to
" yourself being the author of your own
" woes?"

" As to my having imposed upon you,
" I sincerely implore your forgiveness. It
" was the only deceit I have practised, and
" credit me, it shall be the last; as to the
" woes I have brought on myself by that
" conduct, though they were very severe
" while they lasted, yet the present pro-
" speet of felicity has obliterated the re-
" membrance of them. Under the cha-
" racter I assumed I had the only chance
" of knowing your sentiments void of dis-
" guise, and if I shall still find that ac-
" quainting you with the reality of my
" situation has made no change in your
" sen-

"sentiments, I shall be then most happy."

"I know not," said the lovely girl, with a bewitching smile, "that you have any reason to doubt it."

"Then you will not forget in Lord Stanton, the happy, the favoured George Benson."

"I hope you will not give me cause," replied she archly.

"Never, never," said I, catching her in my arms, and pressing the adorable maid to my enraptured breast.

"I will, I must believe you, my Lord."

It is out of my power, dear Hilgrove, to repeat all this conversation to you: suffice it to say, that I obtained every acknowledgement from her that I could desire, to convince me that her heart was not estranged from me, and that the malice of my enemies, operating with my own mysterious behaviour, had obliged her to use

me with such severity; that they had taken advantage of her passions, and spirited her up to abandon me. I failed not to clear myself of every accusation that had been used against me; and I had the heart-felt satisfaction to find her the same amiable, tender, compassionate girl I adored. As all my enjoyment was in her company, time passed unheeded away, whilst I hung upon her accents with transport and delight; but prudence suggested to her, that our long absence from the company would be observed, and render us ridiculous: I obeyed her request, and led her back. Our retreat had not passed unnoticed; and when we returned, a significant smile from the Dutchess gave me to understand, that she knew our employment. Mr. D'Aubigny did not let the matter pass in silence.

“ While you have been entertaining
“ yourself,” said he, “ we have also been
“ engaged in a consultation to promote
“ your

"your happiness, and if we can, secure
"it; the continuance of it must always
"remain in your power. All delays are
"not without danger, and the sooner we
"attain the end of our wishes the dearer
"is the enjoyment of them. Expecta-
"tion for a long time palls the appetite;
"the imagination grows languid, and, like
"a subtle spirit exposed to the air, loses
"its strength and poignancy, and becomes
"dead and vapid. For this reason we
"have been in your absence proposing a
"speedy union. This day fortnight is
"fixed upon, and we shall contrive to get
"every thing ready in that time. If ei-
"ther of you have any objections, men-
"tion them."

"I know of none," replied I: "if
"Miss Conyers has none."

She remained silent.

"It was an excellent proverb invented
"for the ladies," continued the old gen-
tleman, "that silence gave consent; as
"such

“ such I shall construe Matilda’s taciturnity: therefore as your friends and relations only are present, it may not be improper to mention a few words that relate to business. Marriage-settlements are not considered by me in the same light that they are by many people who very often make bad uses of them. There is no accounting for the caprice of the human heart; nor can the passions or prejudices of parents be guarded against, but by a legal agreement to do justice to all their children. This prevents future contests: but this excellent method is prevented when a woman takes advantage of her admirer’s regard for her, and insists upon such terms, as she has no right either to demand or expect; he then becomes a slave to the woman he has bought at an extravagant price; and if you will allow me to speak my sentiments, I must consider it at all events as a very dear bargain.

“gain. However, as I suppose there is
“no design between you of circumvent-
“ing each other, or gaining the most ad-
“vantageous terms, I shall desire to know
“in what manner you propose settling
“this matter.”

“For my share, my good friend, I
“shall leave the affair entirely to you: I
“can have no interest henceforward sepa-
“rate from this lady’s.”

“Well then,” replied he, “I will beg
“the favour of this good lady,” address-
ing himself to my mother, “to assist
“me.”

She nodded consent. This was the hap-
piest sun that ever shone upon me: not
only from the enjoyment I received that day,
but from the prospect I had of a contin-
uance of it. My doubts were all resolv-
ed, my suspicions cleared, and my heart
was at ease. The pleasure I had tasted,
only gave me a wish for more: and my

whole thoughts were occupied in the contemplation of the adorable Matilda.

It was now necessary to undeceive O'Reilly also, to whose friendship and regard I was so much indebted. He was retired before I arrived at my lodgings. In the morning our meeting was as usual, and I informed him of the happy change in my circumstances, with regard to Matilda. He congratulated me upon my thinking myself happy. Still his prejudices were as strong as ever: but he confessed to me, nevertheless, that if there was any one could make him change his opinion of the sex, it was Miss Conyers. Breakfast was brought in, and with it Frank delivered a message, in which, as he had been instructed, he gave me a title which O'Reilly never had conceived to belong to me. Before he could recover from his surprise, a servant from the Dutches came with Lady Stanton's desire that I would remain at home till a particular hour, as

she

she intended to call on me. As he had taken great care not to fail in addressing me with *my Lord*, and *your Lordship*, this encreased O'Reilly's astonishment. I could not help enjoying it in silence. When we were left to ourselves, it was some time before he could ask me the reason of this change in my address.

" This alteration in your title," said he, " makes me unhappy: not that I repine " at your being placed in a more elevated " situation than I am, but because by that " means we shall be deprived of that equa- " lity which constitutes the continuance " and reality of friendship."

" Assure yourself, my dear O'Reilly, " that it shall make no difference between " us. We may, and will, enjoy the same " intimacy, the same familiarity, as when " you only knew me for plain George " Benson."

I then informed him that the Lady Stanton, who was to call on me, was my mother; that

that I had acquainted her with the obligations I was under to him, and that being desirous to return him her thanks, she took this opportunity of calling on me. As I spoke, never was man affected with a more distressing confusion. He blushed, and laboured under the greatest embarrassment.

" You have wronged me," replied he, " in magnifying my nothings into services. " I shall be ashamed to see the Lady: " she will think me a vain-glorious boasting fellow, who makes a merit of serving his friend."

" You mistake, dear O Reilly. The old Lady has more penetration than that. She esteems you as your kindness to me deserve."

She arrived as we had finished our conversation. The manner in which O Reilly received and returned the compliments she paid him, gave me an high opinion of his politeness and good sense. At her request,

request, he accompanied us to look at an house, ready-furnished, till we should be able to get one to our liking. In our way we called upon Miss Conyers, who, rememb'ring the part that O'Reilly had heretofore acted, could not help blushing at his appearance. I have the great happiness to find that my mother is pleased with my choice of Matilda; nay, I begin to grow jealous already, lest she should engross too great a share of my good Lady's affection.

I wait with impatience, my dear James, till the day comes which shall unite me to Matilda for ever. And if any thing could add to my satisfaction that day, it would be to see my friend also make the same vows as I shall. Come then, dear Hillgrove, bring with thee the dear object of thy affection, the future partner of thy heart, thy troubles and thy pleasures. Let us be joined to our respective wives in the presence of each other, that by hereafter

re-

recollecting that we were reciprocally witnesses to the solemn promises we made, we shall ever, upon that account, adhere more strictly to them.

I consider myself in the light of a man, who has escaped from some imminent danger, the recollection of which is so terrible, that I can hardly assure myself that I am in safety. But such is the state of man! Our happiness is but comparative, and the security of my present situation is heightened, and the pleasure encreased by the remembrance of the misery I endured: So true are words of the poet:

Alas! by some degree of woe,
We every bliss must gain,
That heart can ne'r a transport know,
That never felt a pain.

Dear James, comply with my request.
Be expeditious, for I can't delay. I can
subscribe myself, with truth,

Your's, STANTON.

THE END.